Captain Dan Richards

Everett T. Tomlinson

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"At that moment Dan was tackled"

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BY

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PREFACE

INTEREST in school life is perpetual. The new generation, whether found in Maine or California, is facing problems which, although every individual considers them unique, are much the same. The elements of character are not largely subject to the control of geography nor of the passing years. Hope, courage, and faith are among the unseen and the eternal elements of life.

A story based upon the life in a boarding-school contains a little more of the element of romance than does the story which has the high school for its setting. Perhaps in this case, as in many others, distance lends enchantment. Whatever the cause may be, most boys are of the opinion that self-reliance, independence, and the difficulties and rewards are a little more closely defined in the former school than in the latter.

In this story the writer has taken as his hero an ordinary boy facing the problems, which, under varying forms, every lad must meet and by which he is either made or broken.

Of course I have no desire to have a familiar "moral" transferred from the end, where it formerly was placed, to the beginning of the book. I

have made these statements because they were based upon my own experience and observation. It is not natural for young life to deal with abstract questions. As in the case of older persons, these appeals are never so strong as when they are personal. The love of a story is almost instinctive. It is one of the earliest requests of childhood. So the lessons which I would teach I have tried to incorporate in a story. If the tale shall interest my young readers I shall be glad. If it shall inspire them I shall rejoice still more.

I wish here to express my gratitude for the many responses which have come from my young readers, and assure them that although I am unable to write to each, their words are always a source of encouragement.

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

ELIZABETH, N. J.

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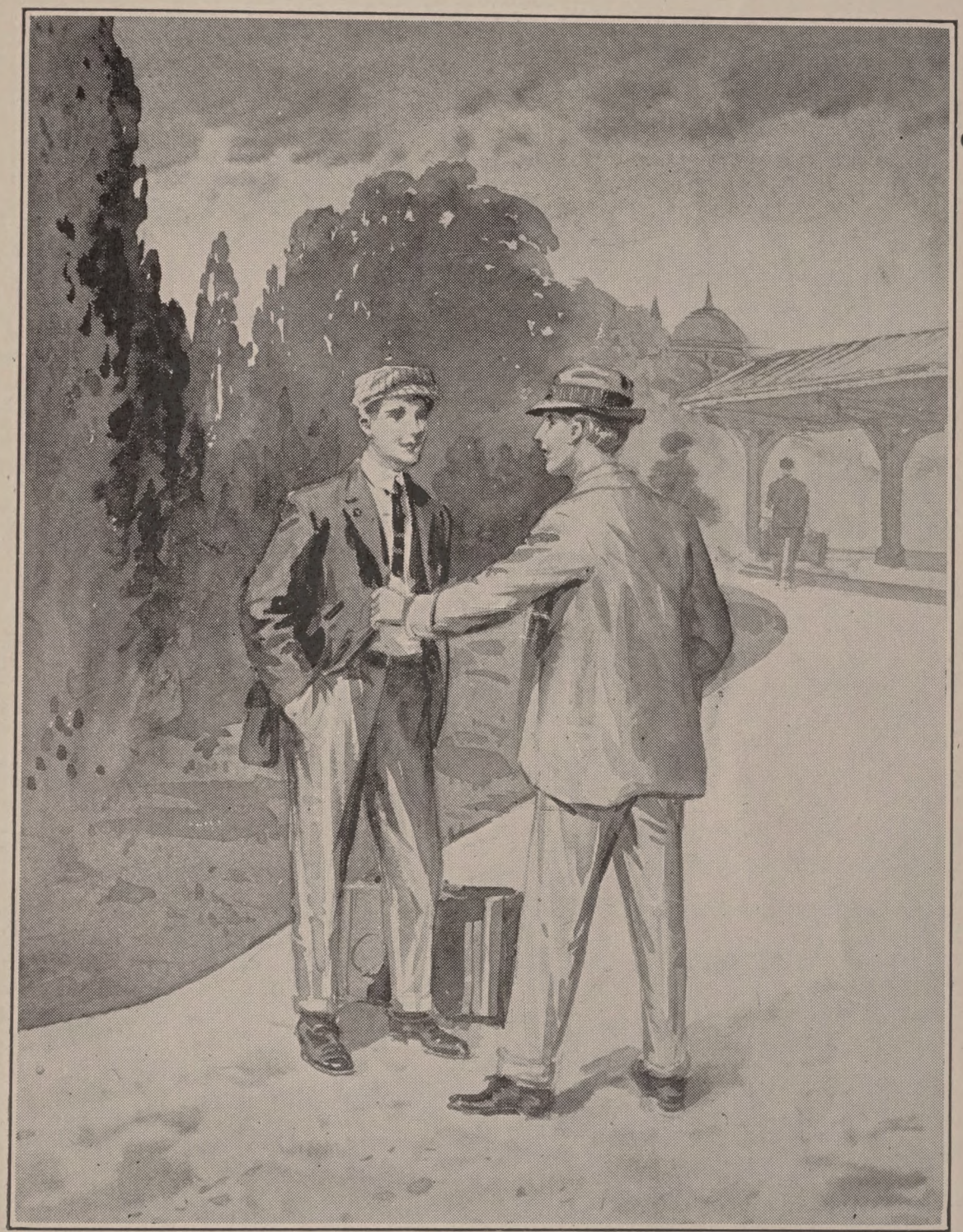
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" ' Easy, lad ! Easy ! ' broke in Ned "

Captain Dan Richards

CHAPTER I

IN THE STATION

"HELLO-O-O, Walter!"

The young man who was addressed in this somewhat unconventional manner turned about sharply as he heard the hail, and as soon as he saw his friend and schoolmate rushing toward the waiting train he ran quickly to meet him.

"Ned Davis!" he exclaimed, as he seized the hand of his classmate and compelled him to drop the suit-case he was carrying. "Where did you come from? Going up to school now? Had a good time this summer? Where have you been? What have you been doing? Hear about any new fellows entering? Any good material for the football team? Have you decided whether or not you're going to college? How is——"

"Easy, lad! Easy!" broke in Ned at last. "One at a time, if you please. I can stand a question or two, but you fire them at me in great chunks."

"Can't help it," laughed Walter. "There's so much I want to know. It has been a million years since I've seen you."

"How long?"

"Well, it seems like a million anyway."

"Look here, Walter! Honestly, I think you've got that number too high."

"Well, I'll take off ten per cent."

"Let me see, that will make it nine hundred thousand years instead of a million years. That's a little better——"

"You are just as much a stickler as you ever were! The trouble with you is that you haven't any imagination."

"You're mistaken. It is just because I have an imagination and you haven't much of any that I don't exaggerate and you do. Now, if you had in your mental apparatus that quality which enables one to see what doesn't exist——"

"Most of the people I know that do are called liars."

"Precisely. But calling them that doesn't make the accusation true, does it?"

"Botheration! Don't you know our train leaves in a second?"

"You startle me," said Ned dryly as he looked at the huge clock in the great covered station where the two boys had met. "I thought we had at least five minutes. If you are correct and we have only a second, we'd better take things easily and go get some luncheon."

"Come on into the car!"

"Have we really time?"

"No, unless you start! Here! I'll give you a

lift," added Walter as he stooped to grasp one of the bags his friend was carrying.

Ned did not protest, and in a brief time the two boys secured their seats, and, ignoring the presence of their fellow travelers, at once plunged into the conversation which had been interrupted when they boarded their train.

"Now what was question number one?" inquired Ned.

"I don't remember just what it was," laughed Walter. "One will do as well as another, so I'll begin again."

"Pardon me. We must follow some sane order. Now I am positive that I recall the first of your voluble and valuable queries."

"What was it?"

"You inquired 'where I came from.'"

"All right. Where did you come from?"

"Immediately, comparatively, or remotely?"

"Immediately."

"The last change I made was at Liberty Junction."

"You're hopeless!"

"On the contrary, I am extraordinarily confident and optimistic."

"Well, I'm hopeless then."

"About what?"

"You."

"On what basis?"

"Oh, quit! You know what I mean."

"I cannot say that I fathom——"

"What have you been doing this summer?"

"I've had a great time," said Ned, dropping instantly his unctuous manner.

"Of course! You wrote me you had."

"Then why question further?"

"Go on! Tell me what you have been doing."

"Working most of the time."

"At what?"

"Well, my father is interested in two or three water companies. He seemed to think that my services were required at one of the plants, so I consented to help him out."

"Honest?"

"Was I honest? Your question is somewhat indicative of a lurking lack of confidence in my moral nature. I didn't see any money in July and August except what I earned. Ah, Walter, you little know what money is worth until you have been deprived of it and are compelled to get some by the sweat of your brow. Actual brain labor, I call it."

"Do you mean to tell me that you really have been working in the summer vacation?"

"Don't I look the part? If you had seen me crawling out of my little bed in the early candle-light——"

"That's a queer place to have your bed."

"Where's that?"

"You said your bed was in the early candle-light."

"You are mistaken."

"All right. I don't care. Have it your own way. But what do you hear about the school?"

"It is still where it used to be when you and I were boys."

"But what about the new fellows?"

"I don't know anything about them. Hold on; yes, I do too. I have heard of two that are going to enter."

"Who are they?"

"One of them is John Littlemouse."

"John what?"

"John Littlemouse."

"Where did he get that outlandish name?"

"I don't just know, though I fancy it was given him."

"Where does he come from? Do you know anything about him? Can he make the team? How old is he? Where will he room? Who is to be his chum? How did you hear about him? 'Littlemouse'! I've heard of a Littlefield and of a Little, but mouse beats them all."

"Those are all the questions you want to ask?"

"Go on. Tell me what you know."

"John Littlemouse," began Ned soberly, "is an American."

"Quite likely."

"I mean he is an original American. In other words, he's an Indian."

"What?"

"That's right. Full-blood too."

"Where does he come from?"

"Oh, I don't just know that—Chicago or Indian Territory or some other remote region."

"Remote from what?"

"Why, New York of course."

"Do you think New York is the center of everything?"

"Not quite."

"Pretty nearly everything, though," laughed Walter.

"Well, it is."

"You are a modest chap."

"Not modest, but honest."

"And conceited," added Walter a trifle warmly. "If you want to find the right down real, simon-pure, unadulterated, cock-sure——"

"I don't know that I just understand you," broke in Ned calmly; "but if you are talking about me, my advice is to put on the brake. Of course it's only advice——"

"Which wasn't asked."

"But freely given."

"That's one thing there's no doubt about its being more blessed to give than to receive."

"What has all that to do with New York being the greatest city in America—yes, in the whole world? Look at its money——"

"Money can't buy everything."

"What can't it buy?"

"Education."

"Better ask your father about that when the bill for the first quarter comes in."

"Of course he has to pay——"

"Of course he does," repeated Ned dryly.

"But you know what I mean."

"Doubtless your cogent reasoning is the perfection of clarity, but the obtusity of my mental processes prevents me from comprehending——"

"You don't mean obtusity."

"Oh, I don't? Suppose you tell me what I do mean, my learned prig."

"You mean obtuseness."

"Thank you."

"You're quite welcome."

"To resume——"

"Don't, Ned," Walter pleaded. "Stop your nonsense and talk sense."

"Thank you kindly and yet once more. About what shall I talk?"

"John Littlemouse."

"He's a wonder."

"Is he?" asked Walter eagerly. "What is he good in?"

"I fancy he can do the hundred in ten flat."

"Great!"

"I fancy he can do the mile in about four-fifty."

"Immense!"

"As a half-back, I fancy he can't be beat—or tackled."

"Ever seen him play football?"

"I can't say that I have."

"I don't believe you know what you are talking about."

"I sometimes have questioned that myself."

"Have you ever seen this Henry——"

"John, you mean."

"All right. Have you ever seen this John Littlemouse?"

"Never."

"Then what are you talking about, I'd like to know?"

"About the young brave."

"But you yourself say you haven't seen him."

"Alas, too true!"

"And do you know he can do the hundred in ten?"

"I don't."

"You said you did."

"Pardon me."

"That's exactly what you said."

"If I recall my exact words they were, 'I fancy he can do the hundred in ten flat.'"

"It's all the same."

"Not at all. When I say 'I fancy' I mean——"

"Look there, Ned!" interrupted Walter sharply; "that fellow is coming for you!"

As Ned looked up he saw approaching a tall, vigorous lad about the age of Walter. It was plain that he had caught sight of Ned and eagerly was coming to greet him.

CHAPTER II

THE OUTLOOK

"THAT'S Al Randall," said Ned to Walter in a low voice.

"Who is he?"

"Keep still! I'll tell you more about it later. Hello, Al!" Ned added as he arose and grasped the outstretched hand of the newcomer.

As Walter glanced keenly at the stranger he again noted his manifest physical strength. His eyes were kindly in their expression, but there was an element of seriousness, almost of deep trouble, in them that somehow appealed to Walter, who was as responsive as he was impulsive. "You must know Walter Borden," said Ned quickly. "You are to be a classmate of both of us, so the sooner you know every one the better. This is Al Randall," he added.

"Glad to meet you!" exclaimed Walter as he arose and grasped the hand that was extended. "Get your bag and join us. We'll turn the front seat over and have it all to ourselves."

"That's right, go get your bag," added Ned warmly. "There are a good many things I would like to talk over with you before we get to where we're going."

The boys' advice was instantly accepted, and while Al Randall withdrew to secure his belongings in another car, Ned turned to Walter and said, "How'd you like to be like him?"

"He's a fine-looking fellow, if that is what you mean."

"It isn't."

"What do you mean then?"

"He doesn't know who he is."

"I don't understand."

"I'll say it again and say it slowly. Al Randall doesn't know who he is."

"Why doesn't he?"

"He never will know."

"Why not?"

"Because it isn't likely he'll ever be able to find out."

"You are talking stuff."

"No, sir. Cold facts."

"Explain."

"Explain what?"

"Why, he doesn't know who he is. He's got a father, hasn't he?"

"No."

"Well, he had one."

"He never saw him."

"Died when he was so young he can't remember him?"

"Supposedly."

"Go on He knows his mother."

"No."

"I give up."

"It's a great story. Do you know I have never been able to get it out of my mind ever since he told me about it."

"What did he tell you?"

"There was a railroad wreck. He was a baby and was saved."

"Father and mother both killed?" inquired Walter, still more deeply interested.

"I told you—supposedly."

"Wasn't there a mark or anything to show what this fellow's name was?"

"Not a thing."

"No one ever claimed him?"

"Not a soul."

"No inquiries or advertisements?"

"Not one."

"Who took him?"

"A family named Randall."

"Adopted him?"

"Yes."

"So that's why he is called Al Randall."

"It is."

"Here he comes," said Walter hastily. "Where did you say you met him?"

"Up in the White Mountains this summer."

"But I thought you said you were working all this summer," laughed Walter.

"I had some spells of actual brain labor, and after

that I rested. I also played ball a little—but after I saw Al Randall play I thought what I did was mighty little."

"Is he good?"

"Good? Good? Why, man, he's good, better, best."

"Better than Dan?"

"Different. Now look out and don't stare at him or ask him any childish questions. Be a good little boy. Children are to be seen and not heard, you know."

"Not when you are around," retorted Walter. "Ned tells me you are a great player," he added as their new classmate took his seat and faced them.

"Does he?"

"He certainly does. What's your position?"

"When I have played it usually has been behind the bat or in the field."

"Great!" said Walter firmly. "We need a backstop as a sub, Ned. The great trouble has been to find somebody who could hold Dan. Do you play football?" he added quickly.

"In what position? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Full-back."

"That's all right."

"I don't know that I shall go in for that sort of thing at the Tait School."

"Why not?" demanded Walter, aghast.

"I want to enter college next year."

"What of it?"

"I've a lot of work to do if I go."

"So has Walter," laughed Ned.

"Correct. If you'd do as well in your own class work as——"

"You do?" interrupted Ned.

"No," laughed Walter good-naturedly. "What I meant was that, if you could only do half as well in settling your own affairs as you do in settling the affairs of others, you'd be valedictorian of our class."

"Oh, I could do that all right," said Ned lightly. "If I used my massive intellect all at once——"

"Try it."

"Some day I shall."

"That'll be the day, then, when you make a recitation. I want to be on hand for that."

"I'm afraid you wouldn't understand what I was doing."

"Try it," repeated Walter.

"But I'm not joking," protested their new acquaintance. "I've got to work."

"So have we all—if we stay in school," said Walter a trifle glumly. "That's the worst of it."

"No, it's the best of it," said Al soberly.

"Of course we've got to work——"

"I don't mean that. I don't mean that at all. The way I look at it is this: If I'm going to do anything or be anything in the world I've got to work for it. I notice that the big difference between men

is in their ability to work. The man with a trained brain can dig a ditch just as well, perhaps even a little better than the man who does dig it, and get a dollar seventy-five or two dollars a day for his work; but the ditch-digger can't do the work that the man who has his brains trained can do. That's just where the difference comes in. I want to have my brain trained, and that's why I'm here. That's what the school is for, isn't it?"

"Yes, I guess it is," admitted Walter a little glumly. "Quit your funny work!" he added sharply as he saw that Ned was smiling benignantly upon him.

"You are quite right," said Ned solemnly, ignoring Walter's warning.

"Of course I'm right," said Al earnestly. "If I stop on the street and buy five-cents' worth of peanuts from an Italian and he gives me short measure, what can I do?"

"You lose."

"No, sir. I go to the gentleman from sunny Italy and demand that I receive five-cents' worth of peanuts, because I have given him the full value of five cents in the coin of the realm. Just so I intend to get my money's worth in the training of my brain. The Tait School is not a cheap affair."

"I trow not," murmured Ned sympathetically.

"Of course it isn't!" continued Al. "Now, why should I go up there and pay my term bill and then not get the worth of my money? I never could see

any sense in a fellow paying for something he doesn't get."

"He gets a lot of fun," protested Walter somewhat feebly.

"All right; but that isn't the first thing he goes there for, is it?"

"Nay, varily," joined in Ned unctuously. "They make us work."

"Aren't you glad of it?"

"I haven't found myself rejoicing unduly as yet. You never can tell, though. Who knows? I may be singing *hic, hæc, hoc,* to the tune of Yankee Doodle yet." As he spoke Ned began to whistle the tune softly to which he had just referred. Both his companions laughed, and Ned added: "I can't believe I'll ever be guilty of that in Scippie's room, though."

"Who is Scippie?" inquired Al innocently.

"'Scippie?' Why, that's Scipio Africanus, called Scippie for short."

Al shook his head, still mystified, and Ned laughingly added: "That name doesn't appear in the catalogue. It's a title given to Mr. Blackman."

"The teacher of Latin?"

"The very same. You've guessed it the first thing."

"Who gave it?"

"The boys, I guess."

"What for?"

"You've got me now. To keep him from being

lonesome maybe. No. Wasn't Scipio Africanus one of the old boys who divided Gaul or something into three parts? That sounds like it to me."

"I don't know any more about it than you do. Do you know who Scipio Africanus was?" demanded Al of Walter.

"I guess Ned is right, he was one of the old boys——"

"I guess you don't either one of you know any more about it than I do, and that's nothing," laughed Al. "You didn't get your measure full of peanuts."

"You ask Scippie the next time you go in his room, Walter," suggested Ned.

"Not on your life! Let Al do it."

"Why should I be the victim?" inquired the new boy with a smile.

"Because you are a new boy and Scipio won't hurt you. Besides, you're a fellow after his own heart. You want to study."

"Don't you?" demanded Al seriously.

"I don't want to overdo it."

"Neither do I. Nobody wants to overdo it."

"How about underdoing it?" drawled Ned.

"What's it all good for anyway?" asked Walter testily. "Suppose I do find out just who Scipio Africanus was and what he did and all about him. How will that help me any? He's dead and buried."

"Say dead and burned, child."

"Well, he's dead and gone anyway. What difference does it make to me now? I can't help it."

"What are you here for then?" asked Al.

"To be educated—that what you mean?" retorted Walter.

"Well, how are you going to be educated if you don't——"

"Don't bother me!" broke in Walter. "The next stop is Wessex, and that is where Dan usually boards the train. I wonder if he'll be here now?"

"Better ask if he'll be as good in the 'box' as he was last year," suggested Ned.

"He will be," said Walter confidently.

"You haven't seen him this summer, have you?"

"Only once—that was before I sailed with my mother for England."

"Is he to room with you this year?"

"Of course he is. Why shouldn't he?" asked Walter a trifle uneasily, as he recalled the experiences of the year that was gone.[1]

"Well, here's the station; and if Dan is here too, we'll be all right," said Ned as he arose and moved toward the platform.

[1] See "The Pennant."

CHAPTER III

NEW PLANS

AS soon as the train halted Dan stepped hastily on board, joining his somewhat noisy friends in the seats they had reserved. The greetings and introductions once made, the four boys were soon as confidential and friendly as if there had not been a stranger among them.

"You look just the same as you did, only more so," said Walter, as he placed his hand on Dan's knee and looked earnestly into his face.

"I'm two or three months older," said Dan, smiling as he spoke in his quiet way.

"How is your pitching arm?"

"Still here."

"Pitched any this summer?"

"Three or four games."

"You didn't get any pay for them, did you?" demanded Walter quickly.

Dan smiled as he replied, "I sha'n't retire on the fortune I received."

"But did you take any money?" persisted Walter.

"Why?"

"Summer baseball is tabooed, you know."

"In the colleges."



" ' You didn't get any pay for them, did you ? ' "

"Yes, and in the schools too."

"How is that? Who 'tabooed' it?"

"Why—why—it just wouldn't do, you know. It wouldn't do at all."

"Just explain."

"Why—why—we'd be charged with hiring a professional. And a pitcher too—that would make it worse yet."

"How?"

"The battery is usually what is hired when a nine is in distress."

"I'm not a professional."

"You're not, unless you took money for playing. You didn't do that, did you?"

"I can't see anything wrong in it if I did. I haven't any money. I work on the farm all day. If I happen to be able to play ball and somebody should say he'd give me three dollars to hire a substitute to do my work on the farm if I would pitch for the nine, why, for the life of me, I can't see anything wrong in accepting that."

"Did you do that, Dan?" asked Walter very soberly.

"I didn't say I did."

"You haven't told any one about it, have you?"

"No one has ever asked me."

"Well, don't tell us," spoke up Ned hastily.

"I sha'n't—unless you ask me," replied Dan, smiling as he spoke.

"It would be a shame to lose you, Dan, when

we have just found the greatest back-stop for you that ever put on a glove."

"Who is he?"

"This man," said Walter promptly, as he slapped Al's knee.

"You put that too high," suggested Ned. "I know what Al can do, for I played with him this summer. He is all right, but I'd hardly say he is the best in the world, as Walter does. And he never saw Al play, either."

"That's the reason he rates me so high," said Al Randall dryly. "If he had seen me, he wouldn't talk that way."

"Yes, he would. Walter never deals in anything less than 'a million' or the 'whole world.'"

"What do you call it when you say I 'never' deal in anything less?" Walter demanded. "Just tell me what you call that!"

"That is nearer the truth than you often come."

"Well, Al Randall is a good-enough catcher to hold Dan," said Walter. "I don't know that I can say anything higher or bigger than that."

"You don't need to," laughed Ned. "Have you decided about college?" he added, turning to Dan.

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going."

"How?"

"I'll have to work my way."

"You'll do that all right," said Walter meaningly.

"I saw Tim Fluin this summer—he was on the same steamer with me——"

"Who is Tim Fluin?" broke in Dan.

"Don't you know who Tim Fluin is?" demanded Walter. "Well, I trust you'll learn, or you'll never pass your entrance exams."

"'Never'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me, then, who Timothy is. I'll get that far in my exam anyway."

"He's the manager of the best team in the college league."

"How does that affect me?"

"He's coming up some day to see you pitch."

"I hope he'll not be disappointed."

"You needn't worry about that."

"What should I worry about?"

"Nothing. You're made if you make good with Tim Fluin."

"I don't see."

"Well, your college course won't be very expensive, that's all," laughed Walter meaningly.

"Why won't it?"

"You'll find that out after Tim talks to you."

"What will he say?"

"Oh, he'll find a place for you in the college bookstore or some stunt or other. Your work won't be half as big as your pay."

"If I pitch all right?"

"Exactly. You're beginning to see."

"Do you think that's square?"

"Why not?"

"Isn't that really paying me for playing ball?"

"Oh, the college teams have heaps of money."

"What has that to do with it?"

"You'll find out."

"But won't that make me a 'professional'?"

"Not if it isn't found out."

"If a man kills another man, then, he isn't a murderer unless he's found out? That what you mean?"

"Don't draw it too fine."

"But you seem to think that if a fellow has a promise of a substitute in hoeing potatoes if he'll play ball, that makes him a professional."

"It does."

"But the other doesn't?"

"No."

"I confess I don't see."

"You will after you have had Tim Fluin talk to you. I can tell you right now, though, that he won't talk much if he hears you have been paid for playing ball this summer."

"Honest?"

"Yes, sir. He couldn't stand for that a little minute."

"What is the difference?"

"Why, that is professionalism. You took money for playing. You can see that, can't you?"

"Perhaps. But if he gives me a job in the dining-

room in college or lets me do something else to pay my way, and it's all done just so that I can pitch for the college nine, I can't see the difference."

"There is a difference, and a big one, let me tell you," said Walter warmly.

"Well, it will be time enough when I have to meet it."

"But don't say another word to a soul about what you did this summer."

"Not if some one asks me about it?"

Walter hesitated a moment before he replied. There was a semi-quizzical expression on his friend's face that was somewhat puzzling. He was well aware of the quiet and yet steady character of his roommate. When Dan once decided, his decision was not to be changed. That he would not evade or do anything that was not in accord with his ideas of honor was too well known even to be questioned. Indeed, though none of the boys was fully aware of the fact, Dan's popularity in the Tait School was due quite as much to the feeling of confidence every one had in him as it was to his marvelous success in the pitcher's box or his way of making friends.

"All I want," said Walter at last, "is that you will not say anything about what you have been doing this summer."

"That will be easy for Dan," said Ned quickly. "He doesn't talk much anyway."

"Well, he wants to be silent in seven languages then, the way Von Moltke used to do."

"Who?" inquired Al.

"Von Moltke. Never heard of him?" retorted Walter somewhat testily.

"No. Who was he?"

"A German."

"A German what?"

"General, I guess. Friend of Bismarck or some other great man."

"When did he live?"

"Not so very long ago."

"Dead now?"

"According to all reports he is. I never saw him."

"Was he a German or a Prussian?"

"I don't know. Don't bother me any more."

"I'm not 'bothering' anybody. You spoke about him, and all I want is to know who he is—or was. I'm for finding out what I don't know."

"Well, I can't tell you any more. I don't know whether he was tall or short, or fat or lean, or whether or not he chewed tobacco."

"You say he was silent in seven languages? How could that be?"

"Try it and see for yourself," retorted Walter sharply.

"Fellows," he added abruptly, "I've a new scheme for this year."

"One or a million?" inquired Ned.

"One, now. I don't know how many will come later. Why don't you ask me what it is?" he

demanded when none of his companions made any inquiries.

"All right, I don't mind," laughed Ned. "What is your scheme?"

"We must organize a senior society."

"What for?"

"For a hundred things."

"Who is to be in it?"

"We four anyway. We'll limit the number of members to ten, and then at the close of the year we'll elect ten from the class below them, and so it will keep on going forever."

"How long?"

"As long as the school lasts. It will be a great scheme. It'll do great things for the school too, and when we come back fifty or sixty years from now the kids that will be here then will point us out as the great original big ten."

"I hope you'll bear your honors with becoming modesty," said Ned mockingly.

"You needn't worry about me. But I tell you I'm going to do it."

"All right. Go ahead."

"Of course I'm going ahead."

"Have you said anything to Doctor Stevens about it?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Oh, being the head of the school, he might be interested, that's all."

"It doesn't concern him."

"Doesn't it?"

"No, sir. Not a little bit. It is 'of the people, by the people, and for the people.'"

"Good. You got that off all right. I say, Walter, you'll be busy this year, won't you?"

"What do you mean? Of course I expect to be busy. Why not?"

"Nothing—that is, nothing in particular. You'll have the teachers to manage. You'll run the football team. You'll probably take your place as short-stop on the nine——"

"Yes; I've got a million things to do," broke in Walter unabashed. "If there wasn't somebody to go ahead, the Tait School would be as flat as a flounder. Somebody has to go ahead, doesn't he?"

"He does."

"I don't do it because I want to——"

"No, we all know that," laughed Ned. "It's just because you don't want the Tait School to be silent in six languages, that's all."

"Seven," said Al solemnly.

"There's the place anyway!" exclaimed Ned, as the train rounded a bend in the road and the school buildings were seen nestled on the hillside among the great trees that had stood for a half-century or more as guardians of the beautiful spot.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW COACH

IN the excitement accompanying the reopening of the school, Walter's time and thoughts largely were given to matters that were not directly connected with his new classmate, Al Randall. Rooms were being settled and their furnishings rearranged, new books were being purchased, and all the varied duties that were a part of the opening of the term by necessity received much attention.

His roommate, less excited than Walter, apparently was always just where he was wanted, whether it was for hanging pictures, telling where the freshly assigned lessons were to be found, or to talk over the plans for the various school teams.

The second night after the reopening Walter was hailed by Ned as they came from the dining-hall. "Where are you going?" he inquired.

"Going to work," laughed Walter.

"You're improving," retorted Ned.

"I guess I need to after what I didn't do last year," replied Walter, striving to speak indifferently, although his cheeks flushed slightly as he referred to his well-known experiences of the preceding year.

"You'll give up football, won't you, now?" laughed Ned.

"No, sir; it's digging and football with me."

"That's all right. Say, Walter, I want to bring one of the new fellows over to your room."

"All right. Glad to see you and him too. Better come over right away. I want to get at my Virgil before the study hour begins."

"My! you're starting off with a rush. Going in for the valedic?"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't do me any good if I did. No, I just want to make up a little of what I've got to have if I ever get in college."

"Nice boy. Well, I won't take very much of your valuable time, but you've got to see this fellow. I want you to get a line on him."

"Bring him along," said Walter lightly.

A few minutes later, in response to a rap on his door and the bidding to enter (which was expressed in the current localism of the Tait School, "What are you standing outside there for?") Ned entered and with him was a tall, dark-skinned, black-eyed boy, of whom Ned had spoken enthusiastically on their journey back to school a few days before this time.

"I want you to meet John Littlemouse," said Ned as he entered.

"That's just what I'm mighty glad to do," said Walter warmly as he held out his hand. "I've heard of you before," he added heartily.

The young Indian smiled pleasantly, responded to the handshake, and took the chair which his host placed in front of him. But in all the introduction he did not speak.

"I'm glad to have you come to the Tait School," said Walter after a brief pause.

"Yes," acknowledged John.

"It's a fine place. Ever been here before?"

"No."

"How did you happen to come here?"

"My friend sent me."

"Well, you've come to the right place anyway. Going to get ready for college?"

"I don't know."

"Where did you learn to speak English so well?"

The young Indian appeared to be somewhat puzzled by the question, but before he could reply Ned said: "What are you thinking about? What language did you think he spoke?"

"The Indian, his own tribe's speech," replied Walter.

"They all use English where he lives."

"I didn't know. Where is your home?" Walter inquired of John.

"Oklahoma."

"Yes, I've heard of that, though I've never been there."

"What do you think Oklahoma is?" demanded Ned tartly. "One would think you never had been outside your little old town to hear you talk. What

do you think it is, the name of a mineral water, or of a new brand of cigars?"

"Neither. I know it's the name of a place."

"Good for you. Now own up, Walter! How large a 'place' do you think it is?"

"I've never been there."

"Big as New York?" persisted Ned mischievously.

"No."

"It's bigger."

"All right. Have it your own way," laughed Walter.

"Oh, you make my little body aweary of this wicked world," retorted Ned.

"Oklahoma is bigger than New York State. It's a beautiful country too. I know, for I have been there, and seen it for myself."

"Hold on! isn't there an Oklahoma City?" demanded Walter sharply.

"Yes," said John.

"There! It was Oklahoma City I was talking about. You poor tramp, you didn't know there was any such town, now did you? Own up like a little man."

"Yes, I did. I've been there too."

"You have? Well, tell me how far Oklahoma City is from Indian Territory."

"About as far as New York City is from New York State."

"How far is that?" asked John quietly.

"It is it. What would New York be without the city?" said Walter.

"That will do. Now ask John some questions," urged Ned.

"All right," said Walter lightly. "Ned, here, says you can do the hundred in ten flat. Can you?"

"No."

Walter's eyes twinkled as he looked at his friend. "What is the best you made it in?"

"The course was grass and the stop watch was not reliable," replied John quietly.

Walter looked at his visitor and after a brief silence asked, "What time did they give you?"

"Ten and two-fifths."

"On a grass course?"

"Yes."

"You'll do, then, if they are within a thousand miles of the facts."

"How many miles?" asked Ned.

"Keep still! Don't you see I'm busy? John," added Walter, turning once more to the young Indian, "did you ever play football?"

"A little."

"What position?"

"End or half-back."

"You look as if you were good for either. What did the team you played on average?"

"One hundred and forty-seven pounds."

"That's not so bad. You're going to play here, of course?"

"If I'm good enough."

"We'll soon settle that. We have our first practice to-morrow afternoon at three-thirty sharp. You're coming down, of course?

"Your name is a funny one," continued Walter, laughing not unkindly. "Why did they put a name like that on you?"

"It is funny, isn't it?" replied John with a smile. "It is the custom of my nation."

"But I thought every Indian boy was known just as the 'son of his father' until he grew up and did something that gave him a name. If he was a good runner, then that fact was made a part of his name; if he was strong on the war-path, then that fact too stood out as a part of his name."

"That is the way it is with some, but my nation names the children after the first thing the mother sees after the child is born. One of my best friends is named Buffalo Meat. That was because his mother happened to see some meat the first thing after he was born. My mother saw a tiny little mouse and a man named John almost at the same time, so she compromised by calling me John Littlemouse."

"If you look up your own name, it's really Howard Walter, isn't it?" inquired Ned a little sharply.

"Yes," replied Walter.

"Do you know what 'Howard' really is?"

"Can't say that I do."

"It is a contraction of hog-ward."

"You know better," retorted Walter sharply.

"I see that I do. That's the reason why I'm explaining it all to you. See?"

"No, I don't believe it."

"Won't believe it, you mean."

"What about your name there? What does your name mean?"

"I don't know; I never looked it up."

"I'll look it up for you; you were so good in looking up mine for me."

"Oh, I just happened to read that the other day. I wasn't looking it up."

"Come in!" called Walter sharply, as a rap on the door was heard. In response, Prentice, another classmate, came into the room, accompanied by a strong, vigorous young man apparently six or eight years older than any of the boys in the room.

"Walter," said Prentice, "I want you to know Mr. Toolan, the new football coach."

"Glad to meet you," said Walter, as he leaped from his chair and enthusiastically grasped the hand of the newcomer. "We've all heard about you and are mighty glad you are to help us out this fall."

"Same here," replied Mr. Toolan in a voice that was harsh and guttural.

"You must meet John Littlemouse," continued Walter, presenting his Indian classmate.

"Pleased to meet yez," said the coach. "What is he—a Dago?" he added in a lower voice to Walter.

"No; he's an Indian."

"Real live one? The only kind I know is the store kind."

"The store kind?" inquired Walter, doing his utmost to prevent John from hearing him.

"Yes, the kind in front of a cigar-store."

"That isn't the kind John is. He's a sprinter, and he has played football before he entered the Tait School."

The interest of the coach was instantly aroused, and turning to the young Indian, who was seated in a chair on the opposite side of the room, he said, "What position did ye play?"

"Half-back."

"Ye look a little 's 'f ye had the right stuff in ye. Can ye run?"

"Some."

"He's done the hundred in ten and two-fifths," suggested Walter.

"Comin' down t' th' practice t'morrow?" inquired the coach.

"Yes."

"That's all right, then. What I'm lookin' fer more'n anything else jest now is a good center. I've seen most o' the fellows who'll try for the team, but I'm a little short o' timber."

"What's the matter with Watson?" asked Walter.

"He's got th' build, but I don't know about his wits. A good deal depends on the wits o' th' center."

"How does it?"

"Why—well, I don't know 's I can do any better 'n tell you 'bout th' center we had on our college team. He was a powerful brute, but his wits was quick. Many's th' time I've seen him grab a handful of dirt or dust an' just rub it in the eyes o' the center o' th' other team when th' ball was snapped back." The coach grinned at the recollection of the "quick wits" of the center of whom he was speaking and his enthusiasm in the game once more was manifest.

"Did he have any other nice little tricks like that?" inquired Walter.

"Chock full."

"For example?"

"He had a grip like a steel vise. Many's th' time I've seen him grab his man right by th' muscles in his leg an' just squeeze. When he let up the man wasn't able to walk for a spell."

There was an expression in Dan's eyes that indicated to Walter what was coming. Before he could interrupt his roommate, however, Dan said in his quiet, modest way to the new coach, "Are you a graduate of the college?"

"Hardly," laughed the coach as if the question was a huge joke.

"What were you doing on the team, then?"

"Playin' football. What did ye s'pose I was doin'?"

"I didn't know but you might be earning money," replied Dan quietly.

"Mebbe I was," laughed the coach, winking at Walter as he spoke. "Everybody has t' live, don't he? But th' football team wasn't made up o' the lumnuses. Every fellow was in college, doin' somethin'."

"Which course did you take?"

"They told me I'd have t' take some studies so't I could be enrolled, ye see. That's what they call it, isn't it—enrollin'?"

"Yes."

"Well, I didn't know just what t' take, but fin'lly I told 'em I guessed I'd take figgerin' an' mebbe a little spellin'."

The boys, with the exception of Dan, all laughed loudly. "What studies did you take?" asked Walter after a pause.

"I did some work in the 'lab.'"

"Chemical laboratory?"

"I dunno. Th' boys all called it the 'lab.' That's all I know about it."

CHAPTER V

THE TELEGRAM

"WHAT do you think of that for a coach?" inquired Walter of Dan when their visitor had departed.

Dan was silent a moment watching his roommate. Walter was still laughing heartily at the crude words of the new coach, whose statements and suggestions plainly were looked upon by him as a joke. "I'll tell you," said Dan soberly, "I don't think much of him."

"Why not?" asked Walter sharply. "He was the best man last year on his college team——"

"What do you mean when you say he was the 'best man'?" broke in Dan.

"Why, the best player, of course."

"Oh!"

"That's what we want him to be best in, isn't it?" demanded Walter a trifle sharply.

"Yes."

"Then what are you talking about?"

"I'm not doing the talking."

"But you act as if you didn't think he was much."

"I don't."

"I'm telling you he was the best——"

"I'm not disputing anything you say about his

playing," broke in Dan quietly. "He has the build for it, and I haven't any doubt that he knows the game and can play."

"What more do you want, I'd like to know?"

"It seems to me the football coach in such a school as Tait ought to be more than a 'mucker.'"

"What makes you think that he's a 'mucker'?"

"His speech, for one thing."

"Oh, I'll admit he does murder the king's English, but what of it? You don't turn everybody down, do you, that makes a slip in his use of words?"

"You know what I mean," said Dan with a smile.

"Well, what else have you against him?" persisted Walter, ignoring the statement.

"I don't like his game."

"You haven't seen it."

"I've heard him tell about it, and that's enough."

"Football isn't a game for girls," said Walter somewhat warmly.

"I don't know that I ever claimed that it was."

"Of course it's rough."

"Is it a game for 'muckers'?"

"They can play it, can't they, if they want to?"

"Of course. Honestly, Walter, what do you think of his scheme for the center to rub a handful of dirt in the eyes of the man against whom he is playing? You don't believe in that; I know you don't."

"We aren't obliged to do everything he suggests."

"He has no right to suggest any such dirty tricks to a lot of boys."

"Perhaps he won't."

"Perhaps he will."

"Well, he knows the game anyway, and we'll get all the good out of him that we can find. You don't have to eat the core of the best apple that grows. But the fact that it has a core inside doesn't make you throw the apple away, does it? I wish I had one of those pippins from that tree by the corner of your barn this very minute. I'd take my chance on the core if I could only get the apple. I feel about the coach in the same way. I may not like everything he does, but if he can play the game I'll cut out all the rest. I don't have to take that if I don't want it."

"That's all very well for you, Walter; but I confess I don't like to have a coach who'll do anything to win."

"What do you think he's here for? To show us how to lose? We can do that without paying a coach three hundred dollars."

"Then too, he wasn't a regular student in his college. He was on the roll by a low-down trick," suggested Dan. "'Figgerin'' and a 'little spellin''! Bah!"

"You're too squeamish," laughed Walter. "What do you want? A fellow to stop and introduce himself and inquire after the health of all his sisters and cousins and aunts before he tackles his opponent?"

"Hardly," replied Dan with a smile.

"What is it that you want, then?"

"Only what is square. I want the Tait team to win, and win every time it is possible; but I tell you right now that I'd rather lose than win if I had to win by such tricks as our new coach has. And my opinion is too, that he is full of them. Who got him here anyway?"

"The committee on athletics."

"I wonder if they knew anything about him?"

"Not very much, except that he was the best man on the Monroe College team, and Monroe had the best team this year in her history. I guess that is some recommendation. Even you will have to say 'yes' to that."

"I hope I shall be shown that I'm wrong."

"You will be, only you mustn't be looking under his shoulders for feathers, you understand."

"I don't know what you mean."

"O Dan," laughed Walter, "you are almost 'too good to be true.'"

But Dan shook his head, as if he still was puzzled over the words of his friend.

When the first practice of the candidates for the football team was held, however, he had little fault to find with the new coach. The man manifestly knew his business, as Ned tersely described his work of the afternoon. Quiet, strong, requiring much and yet not too much of his young charges, he apparently was able to inspire the players with confidence not only in themselves, but in the work of the team.

Indeed, when a week had elapsed and the boys had been daily drilled by the coach, with the first game only a week away, so strong had become the competition of the candidates for the team that its make-up was still uncertain.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Walter to Al Randall and Ned, who were seated in his room one day, "I don't know just where I am at. About the only fellows who are certain of getting on the eleven are John Littlemouse, maybe you two fellows, and, of course, Dan. He'd be on anything the school gets up, I don't care what it is."

"You're good for quarter, and everybody knows that."

"Am I? Well, last year I thought I knew a little about the work of a quarter-back, but this year I'm not so positive. The new coach is a wonder."

"He certainly is," admitted Ned.

"And Dan, here, thought at first he was nothing but a 'mucker,'" laughed Walter. "You've had to change your mind, old man, now haven't you? Own up that you were mistaken once in your life."

"He certainly knows the game," admitted Dan quietly.

"And he isn't a 'mucker'?" As Dan smiled and made no reply, Walter's enthusiasm at once led him on to other topics. "I have never seen an end that could touch John Littlemouse. He runs like a deer. Why, he's down the field before the ball leaves the ground."

"So?" laughed Ned.

"Well, it's almost so. He's quicker than lightning."

"So?" again laughed Ned.

"Oh, what's the use? You stickle for little things. You look at everything through a microscope."

"And you look through a magnifying-glass or a telescope," laughed Ned.

"We'll call it quits then," said Walter good-naturedly. "Now we want to talk over some of the things that—— Why, hello!" he added sharply as a young boy entered the room, "if here isn't little Carlton! Just look at him, fellows. Did you ever see a chap grow as he has? You're almost ready to put on long trousers. What made you so late? We'd about given you up."

"I couldn't get away——" But Carlton got no further in his explanation, for instantly the boys united in a shout that might have been heard on the football field. "Good for you, little basso profundo! That voice of yours seems to jump from an unearthly treble to a preternatural bass. Sing for us, Carlton, boy."

"Oh, don't torment the little chap," suggested Dan at last. "He isn't to blame."

"Of course he isn't," said Ned. "We're not 'blaming' him, we're just laughing."

"I don't mind. Go on if it does you any good," spoke up Carlton; but even as he spoke his voice broke into so many different tones that even Dan,

who was Carlton's particular hero and defender, was not able to repress a smile.

"What's the prospect for the team?" asked the newcomer.

"Great!" exclaimed Walter. "Say, fellows, we'll have to have Carlton lead one of the cheering sections," he added gleefully. "When one of his voices is tired he can call in another."

"Oh, leave the little fellow alone," protested Dan. "If every fellow in school was as interested as he is, there wouldn't be much lacking."

"He isn't interested in the school; he's interested in you, Dan," said Ned lightly.

"It's all the same," laughed Walter. "I used to be jealous, but I'm not any more. Dan is 'it' as far as the Tait School is concerned."

"Yes, Dan is first person, possessive case, and all the rest of it," said Ned. "I gave up all hope for myself a good while ago. I simply don't stand any show when Dan is around."

"Do you know one thing I've learned since I came here?" spoke up Al Randall.

"You have learned that you must never use 'equal' as a verb, that is, if you have been in Scippie's classes."

"That isn't what I mean," continued Al soberly.

"Well, out with it! Get it off your mind!"

"That's right. If we've got to hear what your valuable information is, don't keep us in this heart-breaking suspense any longer," joined in Ned.

For a moment Al's face flushed an angry red and he manifestly was at a loss to understand in what spirit the bantering words of his friends were spoken.

"Honest confession is good for the soul, you know," laughed Walter. "What is it that troubles you so, Al?"

"Nothing much. But I've noticed one thing—the fellow that tries to be popular here isn't the fellow that is popular."

"Who is?" inquired Walter, looking up quickly as he spoke.

"It's a fellow like Dan Richards. Dan doesn't try at all and yet every one of you says he's the most popular fellow in the Tait School."

"Spare Dan's blushes," laughed Ned.

"It's true just the same," affirmed Al.

"We sha'n't deny it," said Walter. "Dan is the best pitcher Tait ever had."

"That isn't it," said Al, shaking his head positively.

"To what do you attribute the overwhelming esteem in which Dan is held?"

"How do you account for the marvelous regard for the matchless worth of this fellow?" continued Ned banteringly, as he arose and slapped his friend on his shoulders. "Is it due primarily to his manly beauty?"

"He isn't very good-looking, if that is what you mean."

A shout of delight in which even Dan joined

greeted the sober declaration of the new boy. "Cheer up, Dan, it might be worse," laughed Walter. "Do you think it is due to his massive intellect?"

"I don't know anything about his intellect, but I do know that I hear everybody in school talking about him, and every one talks in a way that seems to show he is a particular friend."

"That's enough, isn't it?" inquired Ned.

"No. I don't understand why it is so."

"You've talked enough," said Dan gently. "It isn't a fact and you know it. I have a lot of good friends in the school, but there isn't one of them that cares very much whether I'm here or not, unless it is Carlton here, or Walter," he added hastily.

"No, sir, you're wrong. Everybody's wrong," declared Ned. "I have it. I have the secret of it all."

"Don't keep it to yourself then. Tell it abroad," ordered Walter.

"It isn't what a fellow does, it's what a fellow is that makes it. Now there was Gus Kiggins last year. His dad has a pile of money, and Gus used to spend it too. He'd buy anything for anybody, but it didn't do him any good. The fellows just couldn't forget what Gus was."

"You're right," said Walter warmly, his cheeks reddening at the reference to the boy who had been the cause of much of his trouble the preceding year.

"Oh, quit! You don't know, any of you, what

you're talking about. I happened to make a strike-out record last year, and everybody gave me credit for a good deal more than I really did," said Dan.

"Hear the modest man," said Ned mockingly. "Now wait till you see Walter or me get away with the ball in the game with the freshmen next week. If you want to see the real, simon-pure, unadulterated, genuine article, just wait till I get the right formation to interfere as it ought to and I'll be down the field like a streak. You'll hear the approving plaudits of the assembled multitude, and if I gain twenty yards they'll give me two approving plaudits. But how long do you think they'll remember that? Till the next game, and no longer. Then the next fellow to make a good run will come in for his share and where will little Ned be then, poor thing? No, sir——"

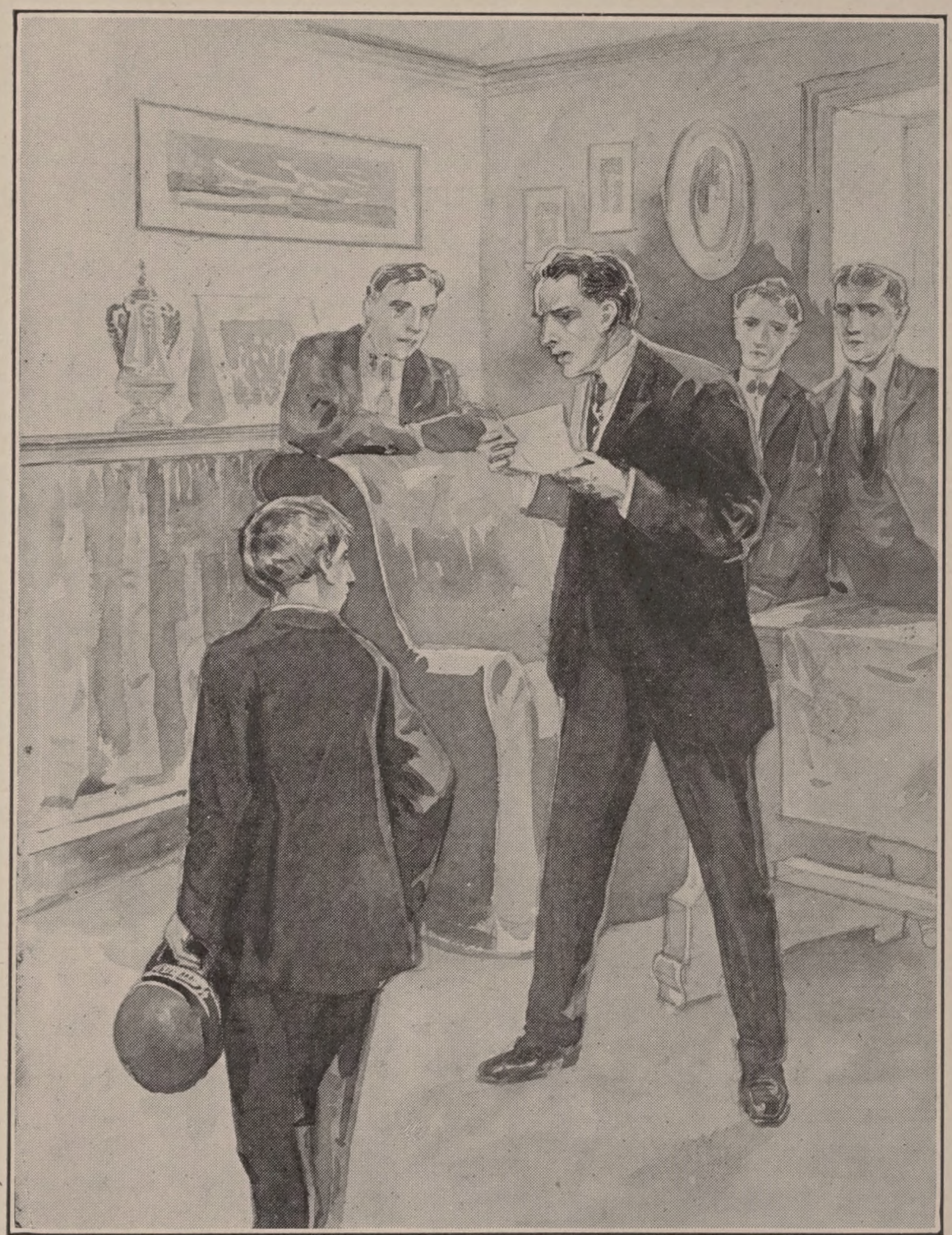
"Hello! Here's the telegraph boy!" said Carlton as a lad entered the room.

"Who is the fortunate you're looking for?" inquired Walter.

"It's for Walter Borden."

"I'm your man," replied Walter as he took the message, and opening the envelope speedily read the contents.

"What's the matter? What's wrong?" asked Dan quickly as his roommate's face turned ashen and he almost fell.



" He took the message and . . . read the contents "

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CHAPTER VI

THE DEPARTURE

WITHOUT a word Walter handed the telegram to his friend. As soon as Dan read the yellow slip he looked up quickly into his roommate's face and said, "Have you a time-table?"

"Yes, in that drawer," replied Walter in a low voice, pointing to his desk as he spoke.

A silence had come over the boys in the room at the sight of their classmate's manifest trouble, although no one of the visitors understood just what it was.

Walter's face and manner, however, betrayed the deep feeling under which he was laboring, and the sympathies of all were correspondingly aroused.

"Anything we can do to help?" inquired Ned sympathetically.

"I guess not," replied Walter; "I just got word from home," he added. "Read it," he said as he handed the slip to his friend.

Taking the paper, Ned slowly read aloud, "'Come home immediately. Father desperately ill.'"

"Too bad," said Al; "I wish I could do something."

Almost ignoring the presence of the other boys, Dan, after studying the time-table, said sharply, "You can get a train in just thirty-one minutes."

"I'm afraid I can't make it."

"Yes, you can! You must make it!" said Dan in his quiet manner.

"Here, Ned; you go over to the office and explain that Walter has been called home by a telegram. Al, you order a carriage and go down to the station and buy a through ticket. You give him the money, Walter."

"I haven't any," replied Walter.

"Get some for him at the office, Ned," quietly ordered Dan. "And Al can stop for you on the way to the station." Dan then added, as he turned to Carlton: "You go down and bring up a carriage. I'll pitch in and help Walter pack what few things he'll need."

In a moment the boys scattered to do Dan's bidding, and the two roommates were left to themselves. Walter seated himself before his desk and in a burst of grief buried his face in his arms as he leaned upon the familiar place. He could not see the expression of deep sympathy in Dan's face, for the latter instantly was busied in collecting a few of his friend's belongings and packing them in the suit-case, which he found without inquiring where it was.

A quarter-hour passed before Walter apparently became aware that everything was in readiness for

his hurried departure for home. "Dan, you're the best fellow in school!" he said chokingly.

"Here comes your carriage," replied Dan quietly.

"You've helped me most by not talking to me."

"Have I?"

"Yes, you have."

"Oh, well, Walter, it may not be as bad as you think. I hope you'll find your father better when you get home. We'll look for that anyway, and you'll send me word just as soon as you are there. Come on; here's our carriage."

"You don't need to go with me, Dan," protested Walter.

"I'm not going any farther than the station," said Dan with a smile. "But I won't leave you till I have to."

Not another word was spoken as the two boys passed down the stairway and entered the waiting carriage. The silence was not broken on the way to the station, but when they drove up alongside the platform and Walter saw the other three boys there awaiting his coming, he said hastily as he stepped out, "You fellows are all good to me."

"You'll find everything all right," said Ned, trying to speak cheerfully. Walter shook his head and did not reply.

"There comes your train, Walter," said Carlton. "You had just time enough. You'd have lost it sure if it hadn't been for Dan."

The hero-worship brought the first smile to

Walter's face, and he took his suit-case and moved down the platform.

"Here's your ticket," said Al.

"And here's your money," added Ned as he thrust some bills into his friend's hand.

"Good-bye, Walter; keep up your courage; you'll find everything all right!" called Ned as his friend prepared to board the train.

"Don't forget! Send me a telegram just as soon as you get home," said Dan in a low voice. "If there is anything I can do, send for me."

"Good-bye, Dan. Good-bye, fellows," was all that the troubled boy could say in response to the farewells of his friends as the puffing train departed.

"Too bad," said Ned, as the boys walked back to the school. "But Walter is such an impressive chap. He lets his feelings get away with him. He is certain sure the worst possible things must be the true ones."

"This is bad in my opinion," said Dan quietly.

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't like the way that telegram was worded."

"His mother sent it, didn't she?"

"Her name is signed, but the wording doesn't sound like her."

"What do you think?"

"I'm just afraid, that's all."

"Of what?"

"That some one else sent the message in her name."

"What if they did?"

"Then I'm afraid—of course it may not be so—that the full truth of the message hasn't been sent."

"Oh, you're another croaker, Dan," said Ned lightly.

"I'd like to have that proved to be true."

"It is true. You're always so sober——"

"It would be a hard thing for me," said Dan, ignoring the words of his friend, "if anything should happen to Walter's father."

"Why? How? What do you mean?"

"He pays my way in the Tait School. But that is a mighty small thing compared to Walter and his mother."

"You mean you'd have to leave?"

"You know that as well as I do."

"I don't believe it would make any difference. They'd want to keep you right on doing just what they knew Walter's father would want. Don't you let that worry you, Dan, old man."

"I'm not worrying. I wish I hadn't spoken of that at all. It was selfish in me when Walter and his mother are in such trouble."

"You don't know that they are. What's the use in looking for the dark side until you have to?" demanded Ned a trifle tartly as his companion slightly shook his head.

"I'm not looking for it, but I can't play the part of the cheerful idiot. I can't smile and smile when I know things are serious."

"But you don't know."

"I know they've telegraphed Walter to come home. Now don't say anything more about it. He'll send me a wire to-morrow, anyway."

"All right. You'll be down for the practice to-morrow?"

"Surely."

"Good."

"Why did you think I wouldn't report?"

"I didn't know but you'd rather stay in your room."

"Because Walter is in trouble?" inquired Dan with a smile.

"Yes."

"Well, I sha'n't. That doesn't help the trouble any."

"That's the way to talk!"

"That's the way it is, at least with me," said Dan as he entered the dormitory and went up to his room.

How changed everything was! The books and articles which his roommate had left scattered about the room all seemed to have a language of their own. Walter had gone home. Would he return? And what about his own future? Dan endeavored to banish the last suggestion from his mind, assuring himself that he was selfish in dwelling upon his own possible troubles at a time when Walter and his mother were bowed down with grief. As he looked about him, Dan thought of the change that had come

over Walter. Instead of the selfish, care-free boy led into trouble by Gus Kiggins and others as he had been the preceding year, he now seemed to be deeply in earnest and his better nature was asserting itself. Walter had ever been a fellow of generous impulses—generous, that is, if what he gave away did not cost him anything in effort or self-denial—but recently he had changed wonderfully, Dan assured himself. His roommate now was awake. And Dan did not forget that the generosity of Walter's father in sending him to the Tait School was almost entirely due to Walter's expressed desires. He was under deep obligations to both of them—obligations so great that he never would be able fully to repay them.

But Dan was not one to brood over troubles that had not yet come. In a brief time he busied himself with his lessons, confident that he would receive a telegram from Walter early the following day that would tell him what he so much wanted to know.

The next day came, however, and brought no message. When the hour for the afternoon practice arrived and still no word from Walter had been received, Dan somewhat reluctantly went to the football field and joined in the practice game under the direction of the coach. For the coach Dan had come to cherish a different feeling from the one he had manifested when the " dirty football " had been suggested. Not a questionable trick or play had

been taught, at least Dan had not heard of any being suggested, though the coach had drilled his charges in several trick plays that all the boys agreed were "great" and certain to work havoc on the line of their opponents.

"Come on, Ned," said Dan when at last he and his classmate were departing from the field.

"Where? I've got to do forty lines of Virgil."

"Never mind that now."

"Will you read them to me?"

"If you want me to, though I don't really believe you do."

"Don't I? You just watch me!" laughed Ned. "What put such a thought into your head, as that I would object?"

"I don't know," replied Dan with a smile. "Perhaps I was thinking of what Doctor Stevens said to me the first time I went to him after I entered here. I'd run into a snag in my Cæsar."

"Did the old boy say he wouldn't translate it for you? That would be just like him. He never wants to help any of the fellows."

"No. He said he'd translate it for me."

"He did?"

"Yes, but——"

"Oh, I knew there was a string to it somewhere."

"I'm glad there was. He opened my eyes good and wide."

"How?"

"Oh, he looked at me a minute and then asked me if I thought the passage was hard. I told him I did. Then he said: 'It is hard—one of the hardest in Cæsar. I'll translate it if you wish, but I have found that usually most of our boys fifteen years of age can dig it out if they will really work at it.'"

"That was just like him," growled Ned.

"Maybe it was; but though I was stirred up at first by what he said and I thought he was mighty disagreeable about it, I was too angry to go back to him for help. I just went at it and got the stuff myself. I've never asked any one to help me since."

"You're a good little boy."

"Well, I learned to do it for myself, anyway. Doctor Stevens seems to be a little hard at first, but he really isn't, for he teaches the fellows to do their own work. And, after all, as Al Randall says, that's what we're here for, anyway, isn't it?"

"I'm working a good deal harder than I want to," said Ned ruefully.

"Perhaps you don't know how to do your work."

"Do you?" asked Ned tartly.

"No. If I did I shouldn't be here. That's what I'm in the Tait School for—to get what few brains I have into working order. Doctor Stevens has helped me more than any one else, because he has made me help myself. The other day he asked me how long it took me to get my Virgil. I told him two hours. 'Richards, if you'll put your mind right

on your work you can get that lesson in an hour and three-quarters,' he told me. And now I find I can."

"Pretty soon you'll be getting it in an hour and a half, then in an hour. Why, Dan, if you keep on reducing it you'll have your Virgil lesson about fifteen minutes before you start."

"No such luck as that. Ah!" added Dan as the two boys entered his room and he saw a yellow envelope unopened on his desk, "that's what I wanted you to come for, Ned. I thought there'd be a telegram from Walter. It may mean as much to me in one way as it does to him."

"Open it and find out, anyway," suggested Ned sharply.

CHAPTER VII

BALANCING ACCOUNTS

DAN took the little envelope and hastily opened it. There was a tense silence in the room as Ned watched the expression on his classmate's face, striving to discover what word it was that Walter had sent.

"It's just as I feared," said Dan soberly. "Listen to this, 'My father died suddenly yesterday.'"

"'Yesterday' means day before yesterday, doesn't it? When was the message dated?"

"Last night," replied Dan. "You see his father was dead before they wired Walter to come home."

"It's too bad," said Ned thoughtfully. "It won't make any difference in Walter's coming back to school, will it?"

"I don't think so."

"And it won't in your coming either?" said Ned quickly. "Probably your bill has been paid."

"I'm not sure about that; and I'm not sure either, even if it has, that I ought to take it."

"Why not?"

"There are 'a million reasons,' as Walter would say."

"And not one of them good," protested Ned.

"That remains to be seen."

"Going to wire Walter?"

"I think I'll write him."

"I'll send him a letter too. You write at your desk, and I'll sit down here at Walter's and write mine. I guess he won't feel any worse for getting a word from each of us."

Both boys acted on the suggestion, and in a brief time the two letters were posted.

The news of the sorrow that had come to Walter had spread rapidly through the school, and the following day his class met and adopted some boyish resolutions of sympathy, which were sent to him.

Troubled as Ned was by the possibility which suggested that the death of Walter's father might interfere with Dan's remaining in the school, he nevertheless was greatly cheered by his classmate's steady and continued work with the football team. Indeed, the first game of the season was played, and Dan's strength and agility were in such evidence that not even Al Randall or John Littlemouse, who played a wonderful game at left end, received more enthusiastic praise from the excited body of spectators who were watching the game.

"That was good work you did as half-back today," said the coach to Dan when he joined the latter and Ned a half-hour after the game, when the two boys were walking across the field.

"Thank you," said Dan simply.

"Yes, sir! It's fifty per cent better than you

have ever done on the field before. You still are a little slow in getting started, but that will come. I'll give you a few pointers to-morrow or next day."

"And that was the man you wanted fired, Dan," laughed Ned, as the coach left them when they entered their dormitory. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Why?"

"For suggesting that the coach is a 'mucker.'"

"Well, he is a mucker. I'm just as sure of it as ever I was."

"What makes you say that? You haven't seen anything off color, have you?"

"Not yet."

"'Not yet!' You are looking for something all the time, aren't you?"

"No."

"You'll be disappointed if you don't find it? That's all wrong, Dan. You haven't any right to talk such stuff."

"I'm not talking it," said Dan gently. "You asked me a question and I answered it. That's all there is to it."

"Hold on! Here's a letter from Walter," said Dan hastily as they entered his room. "Wait a minute, Ned, and I'll read it to you."

Ned seated himself obediently in the easy chair in front of the window and, tossing his cap upon the table, prepared to listen to Walter's message. He

was much more interested than he wanted Dan to know. He was watching his classmate's face with an intensity which the latter would have felt or seen if he had not been so absorbed.

"DEAR OLD DAN," the letter began: "I want you to tell all the fellows how much good their letters did me. It was mighty good of them, and I'll try to show it after a while, but just now I can't write much. I met a woman whom I knew on the train, just about twenty miles from my home. The moment she saw me I knew the worst had come. I asked her if she had heard how my father was. She said she had heard he was dead. If a man had knocked me down with a club, I wouldn't have been more startled. Up to that time I hadn't even thought of that. And it was all wrong, Dan. I know the man who sent me the message meant it all right; but, I tell you, it was a big mistake. I want to know just exactly how things are. Of course he thought it would be too big a shock to me, and that I would be ready for the real news by the time I got home. You see, my father wasn't sick any time. He just dropped, and that was the end of all. If they had only telegraphed that, I could have met it better. All the way home I kept thinking that by the time I got here he'd be all right, and would laugh at me for coming home. But he wasn't, Dan, and home doesn't seem a bit like home now. Of course my mother is here, and I'm doing all in my power for

her; but, Dan, she looks to me to help her just as I used to look to my father.

"I haven't time to write a letter now, but I wanted you to know that I don't know whether I shall come back to school or not. Everybody, including me, thought my father was a rich man. It never entered my head that there was any bottom to his pocket. But, Dan, I don't believe he left enough to take care of my mother—to say nothing of myself. He did have a big lot of money coming in every year, and he never saved much of it. He would give to any old thing that came along. Poor old pop! I wish I could tell him just now what I think of him!

"So, you see, all my plans are up in the air, and I don't know just when or where I shall strike the earth again. You'll understand just why it is that I'm not writing a letter now. I just wanted you to know how things are. I'll write a real letter just as soon as I know a little more than I do now. I shall never forget your letter to me, Dan. It did me a world of good, and I needed it all. Give my best regards to all the fellows, and don't forget that you stand at the head of the heap. Good-bye.

"WALTER."

Ned was the first to break the awkward silence that followed. "Dan, you just hold your horses," he said impulsively. "You know Walter as well as I do. He's not had a chance to find out very much

yet, and has jumped to his conclusions. He'll feel differently after a few days."

"That won't pay his bills, or mine."

"That's all so, but what I say is, 'wait.' You can't tell a thing by that letter. It's just like Walter. He does something and then explains afterward."

"It doesn't seem to me——" began Dan slowly.

"Promise me one thing, Dan," broke in Ned earnestly, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"What?"

"That you won't do anything now, and that you'll tell me before——"

"You're not asking much."

"You know what I mean."

"I'm not sure that I do."

"Don't write Walter or his mother or say a word to anybody—anybody, mind, that you're thinking of. Now don't shake your head at me that way. I don't like it. Just be good once in your life and give me your word."

"How long?"

"Till next week."

Dan growled and shook his head.

"Well, wait till you get another letter from Walter."

"I'm afraid he and his mother may think I am just holding on——"

"Don't you fool yourself! They've got troubles enough of their own. They aren't borrowing any of yours. All I want is that you should be reason-

able. Don't do something you'll be sorry for all your life. I tell you it means a good deal more than you realize."

"Does it?"

"Yes, it does."

"Well, I'm sorry."

"I tell you, I know more about this than you do. All I want just now is for you to agree that you won't write Walter or his mother anything about what you have been talking to me about until——"

"Until when?" inquired Dan with a smile, as his classmate hesitated.

"Until you know just what the real condition is."

"You're all right, Ned; though I guess I understand one part that you don't. Just put yourself in my place a minute——"

"I can't," broke in Ned uneasily.

"Yes, you can too! What would you do? How would you feel if somebody was doing for you just what Walter's father has been doing for me? Would you put off doing what I intend to do? If I know you, you'd be right on hand the very first thing. You wouldn't drag it on and wait to see, or at least give them the impression that you were waiting, if somehow the thing couldn't be fixed up so that you could stay on."

"I'm not saying a word against your doing that if it is necessary. All I want you to do is just to wait a bit and find out a little more than we know now. Walter flies off the handle—you know he

does, and so do I—and all I want is that you shouldn't say or do anything you'd be sorry for afterward."

"I'll promise you, Ned, that I'll do that—as far as it is in my power in this matter."

"Honestly?"

"Yes, honestly," replied Dan with a smile.

"That's all I want."

"Why didn't you say so then?"

"I did say it."

"When?"

"I've been saying it all along."

When Dan was left alone in his room he seated himself before his desk and, taking a slip of paper, drew a line through the middle of it and then began to jot down certain elements of his problem. On one side of the line he first placed "Money in hand=$21." On the opposite side he wrote, "What can I do to earn more?" Again and again he jotted down the contrasting problems. At the end of a half-hour his paper presented an appearance somewhat like the following:

THINGS FOR AND THINGS AGAINST DAN RICHARDS.

AGAINST.

1. I have only $21.
2. Walter's father has helped me.
3. It will be hard to go to another school.
4. I am not ready for college.

5. The fellows don't want me to go. N. B. Ned is the only one who knows.

6. I can't take another dollar from Walter or his mother.

7. Everybody has something against him.

8. Only a few fellows ever amount to much.

9. It's going to be hard.

10. I'll have to begin right away.

FOR.

1. I have good health and I believe I can work my way through school. Others have done it, and if they can so can I. N. B. I may not be able to do this in the Tait School. It is expensive here.

2. Walter's father can help me no more. I could not take any money from Walter or his mother, even if they had any left, and Walter says there isn't any.

3. Maybe it will be the best thing that ever happened if I have to go to another school. N. B. I don't believe it.

4. I wonder if I could get into college on what I know now? If I once got in you can rest easy I'd stay there!

5. If they wanted me to go that would be a good reason for staying. N. B. There are probably good fellows in every school. N. B. Some more—there can't be anybody like Ned and Walter and Al and all the rest.

6. I don't have to unless I want to. I have two

strong arms, and my legs are not weak. I can dust, wait on the table, take care of horses, and hoe potatoes. N. B. I wonder how hoeing potatoes and going to the Tait School would agree?

7. I'm no worse off than most fellows.

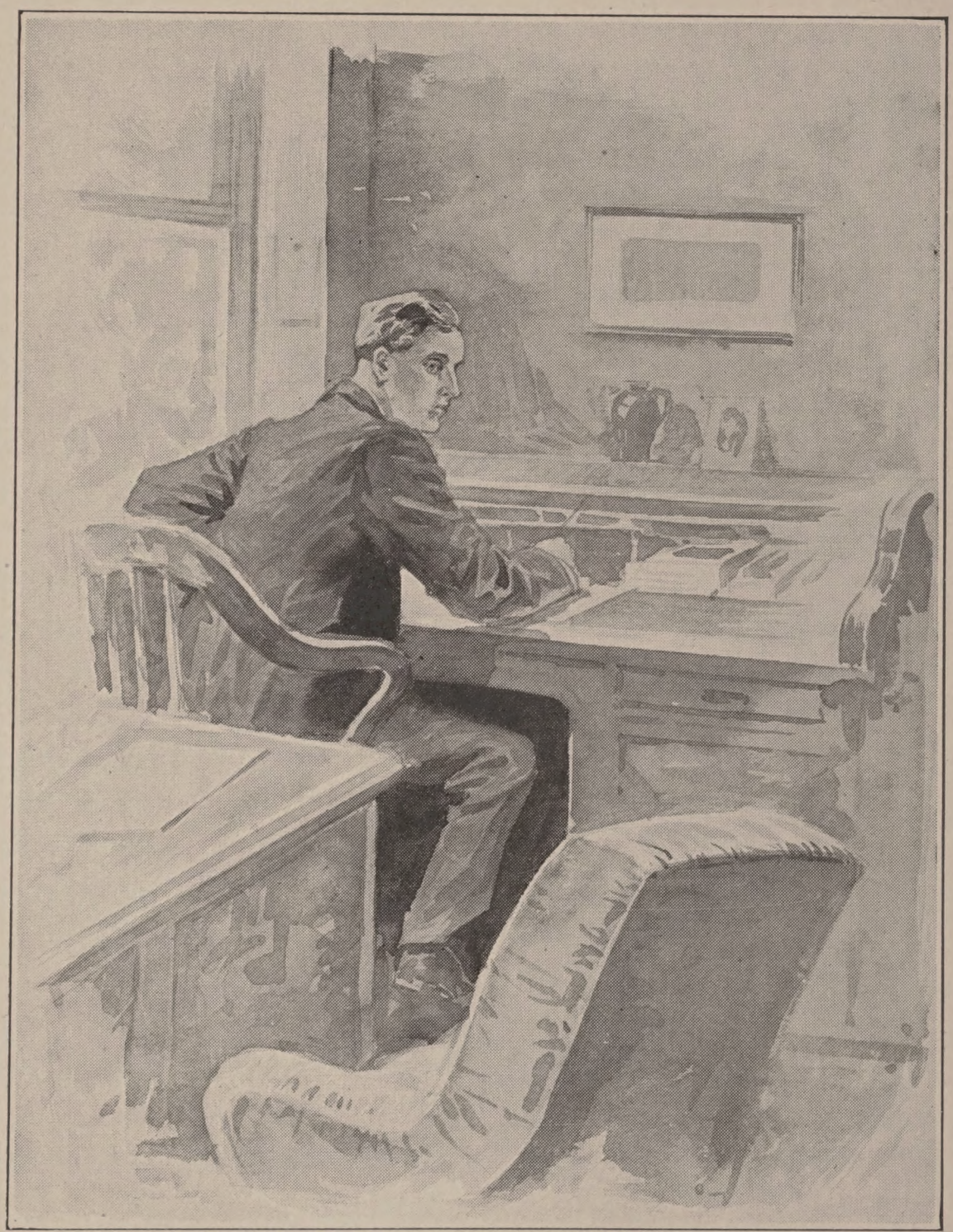
8. I can try, anyway. N. B. Shall I ask Scippie or Doctor Stevens if I'd better try it?

9. I don't believe I'm a coward.

10. Then I'll know all the sooner whether I'd better go back to work on the farm or go on to college.

Balance: I've got more for me than against me.

Dan looked up as a rap on the door was heard at that moment.



"Dan looked up as a rap . . . was heard"

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CHAPTER VIII

AN OFFER TO DAN

"HELLO, Watson! Come in!" called Dan, as in response to an invitation to enter his classmate came into the room and seated himself in an easy chair.

As Dan looked at him there was a momentary twinge of envy. Watson, well dressed, fat, easy-going, was the center on the football team, and one of the wealthiest boys in the Tait School. In the classroom Watson was not a shining light. It was seldom that he made a creditable recitation, and then "only by accident," as Walter expressed it. But he was generous, and his good nature was not easily provoked. His blue eyes and light-brown hair were in keeping with the pink-and-white complexion which had made Walter say several times, "Watson, you look good enough to eat." Fastidious in his dress, he nevertheless was one of the hardest workers on the eleven, and after a game was usually as discolored and torn as it was conceivable for such a boy to be.

"I want to see you, Dan," said Watson a little uneasily.

"Well, here I am," said Dan with a smile. "What

is it?" he added, after a moment of somewhat awkward silence. "Something about the team?"

"Say, our coach is great, isn't he?"

"He knows the game."

"He certainly does. And he's got more tricks up his sleeve——"

"Are they straight, Watson?"

"Why do you ask me that question?"

"Is he straight?"

"I've never seen him do anything crooked," replied Watson a little evasively, as Dan thought.

"Does he try to get you to——"

"Oh, he's all right enough," broke in Watson. "You mustn't be too squeamish when you're out to win. That's what the team is out for, isn't it?"

"We all want to win, anyway," acknowledged Dan, who had decided not to push his inquiries any further at the time. In a little while he himself might be in a position in which the football eleven of Tait, and even the school, would be pushed into the background.

"Of course we do," said Watson more confidently. "And football isn't the only thing we want to win in, either."

"You're correct," said Dan, still more puzzled than before. What was it that his visitor wanted? Such sentiments were not commonly attributed to him.

"I might as well come right out with it," blurted Watson. "Dan, I'm in a peck of trouble."

"I'm sorry for that. Anything I can do to help you?"

"You can, but I'm afraid you won't."

"Go ahead with your tale."

"You never saw my father and mother, did you?" inquired Watson.

"I never did."

"Well, they're all right; but they don't understand a fellow, you see."

"What is the chief misunderstanding just now?"

"They want me to take a prize. Oh, you needn't laugh. I know it is as funny as you think it is, but what is a fellow going to do about it? You see, neither of them ever went to school to amount to much, and they've got it into their heads that I am awful smart. Of course I'm not such a fool as to think any such thing, but that doesn't help any. The fact is they think I'm smart, and anything I say doesn't shake 'em a little bit."

"Which particular prize do you want to take?" inquired Dan, repressing the smile that rose to his lips.

"Oh, it doesn't make much difference—any old thing will do, I guess, as long as it is a prize of some kind."

"But you must have thought over the matter."

"Thought over it! I've thought and slept and dreamed and even had nightmare. I tell you it's no joke either." Watson's round face was the picture of such abject misery that Dan's smile departed, and

his glance was full of sympathy as he looked at his classmate. "It is hard," he said. "You're a mighty good fellow, but as a prize man——"

"Oh, don't rub it in, Dan," groaned his visitor. "What am I going to do about it? I sha'n't dare show my face at home unless I get a prize, and I wouldn't dare show my face here if I should get one. Everybody that knows me would think it was a joke. Nobody would take it seriously or give me credit if I honestly tried."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I propose to make a proposition to you, Dan," said Watson, suddenly sitting erect.

"To me? I don't really see what I have to do with it."

"Now listen, Dan, and don't you dare laugh either. I can't declaim a little bit, so a prize declamation is not for me. I can't tell a Latin verb from a cubic yard, so I'll cut out Latin and mathematics. There isn't much left, you see."

"Not much," admitted Dan smilingly. "Nothing except the prize essay."

"That's it! That's the very thing I came to see you about."

"Why did you come to see me about it?"

"You've got to write it."

"I've been thinking of trying for that prize, I'll own up. I don't know that I have any chance, but it's like yours—better there than anywhere else," said Dan modestly.

"Write as many as you please for yourself, but what I want is for you to write one for me."

"What?"

"That's exactly what I mean," said Watson, now much more boldly.

"What do you mean?" demanded Dan a little sharply.

"I want you to write an essay for me and let me hand it in in my name."

"You are a cool one."

"No, sir; I'm not cool at all. You don't know what this means to me. My family is just dead set on my getting some prize—it doesn't make any difference what it is as long as it's a prize of some kind. Of course it——"

"Of course it wouldn't be your prize—if it happened to come your way, which isn't very likely anyway."

"I'll risk that part of it, if you'll only do it. I'll pay you well for it."

"But it would be my essay that took the prize—if it did—even if it was handed in in your name."

"In a way it would. I'll own up to that. But when a man writes an article for a magazine, he sells it to the magazine, doesn't he?"

"Very likely, though I don't know much about it. I never wrote anything which a magazine ever published."

"But you'd sell it if you had the chance, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's the difference if you write one for me if I pay you for it?"

For a moment Dan was silent. The proposition seemed almost to come as a direct answer to some of the problems he had been considering at the time when his visitor entered his room. And why should he not do it? Why was not Watson's proposal a fair one? He could write the essay, and the disposal of it then would belong to his moon-faced visitor. He himself would not be concerned with what was done with that which really belonged not to him, but to Watson—after the latter had bought and paid for it. Dan was seriously perplexed, and the plausible argument which had been set before him seemed to be almost, if not quite, fair and equitable.

"When do the essays have to be ready?" asked Dan at last.

"They're due February first. You'll do it, won't you? That gives you all the time you'll need. Say you'll do it, Dan?"

"I'll have to think it over," said Dan.

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars for it."

"Whether it takes a prize or not?"

"Yes, sir; I will! And I'll tell you what I'll do more than that, Dan; I'll agree to give you twenty-five for the essay when it is written. If it doesn't take a prize, I'll not say a word. If it does take a prize, I'll give you twenty-five dollars more."

"How much is the prize, anyway?"

"A ten-dollar gold piece."

"Seems to me you aren't going to make much on the bargain," laughed Dan a little uneasily.

"I don't care a rap for the money part of it. My father never holds me up on that line. It's the honor, or, rather, what the family wants that gets me. And I'm right up against that too. I've just got to do something, I tell you. You're the one to get the money, and I'll take the glory."

"Suppose I should write another essay too, and hand it in under my own name?"

"Go ahead."

"Will that be square?"

"Yes."

"But suppose my essay should happen to get the prize and yours shouldn't?"

"I'll run the risk."

"I'll have to think about it, Watson."

"No, don't. A fellow's second thought always begins with a 'But——'"

"How do you know?"

"Tried it."

"You're wise enough to write your own essay, Wat."

"Can't do it."

"I'd rather tutor you in Cicero."

"What's the difference, whether you sell me what you know about Latin or sell me your ideas written on paper?"

"I don't know."

"There isn't any difference. One is as fair and square as the other, and both are all right. If you were trying to sell me the stuff and make me take something I didn't want, then you might talk. But I'm the one that is doing all the business."

"Are you?"

"Not if you'll say you'll write me that essay. If it's the price, Dan, that sticks you, just say the word——"

"It isn't the money."

"What is it then?"

"I can't tell you."

"Nor can any one else. It'll be a great thing for me; it won't hurt you any, and you'll be turning an honest penny too."

"Do you suppose the committee would feel that way about it?"

"It's all one to them, anyway. They don't know who writes any one of the essays. You see, you sign the essay with a fictitious name. Then you write that name on the outside of the envelope and inside the envelope you put a slip with your true name on it. I tell you it's thrilling, Dan, when the chairman or somebody big stands up there on the platform before the school and all the fond fathers and mothers to announce the winners. He takes the envelope—of course he has to get off a long-winded speech that nobody cares for first—and tears off the end and draws out the slip and waits till everybody

feels that he can't wait another minute and then drools out, 'Winner of the first prize, Dan Richards.' Oh, it's great, let me tell you! It fired my father all up when he was here last summer, and now nothing will do except for little Willie to bring glory to the Watson name. Now, Dan, be a good little boy, and say you'll do this little thing for me. I'll——"

"All right, I agree."

"Dan, you'll have a crown some day, at least on a tooth," exclaimed Watson gleefully as he arose and insisted upon shaking Dan by the hand.

"That all you want?"

"Oh, I can take a hint. I guess you don't want me to tarry any longer. Well, that's all right. Good-bye, Dan. Let me know when the magna chartar is ready——"

"When the what?" laughed Dan.

"Isn't magna chartar the right word for it?"

"You mean *magnum opus,* don't you?"

"To be sure. Why, yes, of course." Watson laughed lightly as he departed from the room, leaving Dan still seated before his desk.

It was long before Dan arose, for the conflict in his mind was not a trifling one. Several times he was on the point of running after his classmate and withdrawing the promise he had given, but each time he did not yield. He sat staring at the inkwell on his desk as if it was an object of rare interest. What had he done? What would be the result? Had he

sold himself for twenty-five dollars? The price was not extravagantly high, he muttered. And years before, he thought, one certain man had sold or betrayed his Friend for thirty pieces of silver. Which was worse?

And then again he did his utmost to gratify himself. Everybody would look upon it as a joke. No one could take it seriously, and why should he make so much of it?

Resolutely he strove to look upon his decision in that light as at last he arose and admitted a telegraph messenger, who vainly had been rapping on his door for several minutes.

CHAPTER IX

THE RETURN

EAGER for anything that would draw his thoughts from the promise which he had just given Watson, Dan quickly tore open the envelope and read the message. As he had thought, the word was from Walter and was brief: "Expect me to-morrow afternoon."

Dan's heart was somewhat lighter as he signed his name in the messenger's book. Walter was coming back. Very likely the troubles he had feared had all been imaginary. Mr. Borden's affairs had not been in such a bad state as Walter had at first implied. His roommate was an impulsive fellow and quite likely to see things in their worst light when he first saw them. Perhaps the outlook was not so dark after all.

These thoughts and others similar to them were in Dan's mind when he turned back to his desk. And yet, try as he might, he was not able to banish the recollection of the promise he had given Watson; and essays, and working his way through the Tait School, Walter's return, and "thirty pieces of silver," somehow were strangely confused. Indeed, the following day brought no clearer light, and when

Dan greeted his roommate as he alighted from the incoming train, Walter said quickly, "What's the trouble, Dan?"

"You are the one who has trouble, I guess," replied Dan.

"That's right, in a way," acknowledged Walter, his eyes filling. "But after all, Dan, I can't get away from mine, and I've just got to face it. My mother is pretty well broken up and I'm the only one that can help her."

"How long are you going to stay?"

"What do you mean?"

"You wrote me that you might have to leave school."

"Oh, yes." Walter's tone was somewhat light, and his roommate looked at him almost in amazement. "Well, my mother insisted upon my coming back right away. My father's partner is the executor, and there isn't anything I can do to help him, so mother said I'd better come right back and keep up with my class. If I went on then I'd be ready, and if anything happened that I shouldn't go on I'd be just so much better for the work that I hadn't lost. Besides, we found that the bill for the first half of the year had been paid, anyway."

"Was mine paid too?"

"Yes, sir; of course it was. That was the way my father did things. He used to say he'd pay as he went, and if he couldn't pay he just wouldn't go. Oh, he was all right, let me tell you."



" ' You are the one who has trouble, I guess ' "

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"You don't have to tell me that," said Dan quickly. "Now, Walter," he added, as the two boys approached the school grounds, "there's one thing I must say now——"

"No, don't say it," broke in Walter.

"You don't know what it is."

"Yes I do."

"You can't——"

"Well, go ahead. I suppose it's got to come, and we might as well have it out one time as another."

"I can't let what your father paid for me stand."

"That's what I knew you were going to say, Dan. But it's all right."

"No, it isn't all right," declared Dan positively.

"You can't change what my father did."

"I can say I won't let the payment stand, can't I?"

"What will you do?"

"I haven't decided that yet. There are two or three——"

"Now, look here, Dan, don't be foolish. My father paid for the first half of your school year. That's done, and can't be changed; besides, it wouldn't make a bit of difference to my mother or me, for I guess the truth is that my father used up his income as he went along. So, if that's the way of it——"

"Didn't he leave anything?"

"Some life-insurance. You see his plan was to put his life and work into his business and after a while the business would be enough of itself to

provide for everything and everybody. But his business was so much in his head that now he's gone no one else can carry it on."

"Well, I'm not going to let——"

"You just work for the first half-year. Before that's gone I may be in the same boat with you, and then we'll work it out together."

"But I——"

"Not another word, Dan; not another word unless you want to break me all up; and honestly, I've had about all I think I can stand of that."

Walter's eyes were full again, and Dan was sorely perplexed as to what he ought to say or do at the time. Before he could speak, however, Walter said: "I knew you'd say just what you have said, Dan. Mother and I talked it over before I left home. She is just as strong for this as I am. It isn't as if you could take anything back or were taking anything from us now. It's one of these things that can't be helped or changed. But I knew you'd want to pull out. It's just like you, old man; but unless you want to add to our troubles you won't mention it again. Now tell me about the eleven——"

"We missed you in our game with the freshmen."

"I'm glad you did."

"Are you going to play?"

"Why not?"

"Nothing, only I didn't know."

"Look here, Dan," broke in Walter, "you know how I felt toward my father, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he'd like to have me quit everything?"

"No."

"Well, my mother says she knows it would be his wish to have me take up the whole thing here and go right on with it. Of course I'm broken up; but I don't know that I'd feel any better to give up and sit and mope in my room. I don't believe any fellow ever lived who was more fond of his father than I was of mine. It doesn't seem to me that I can get along without him. But I've just got to, and so has my mother. And you never saw any one brace up the way she has. Now, it won't make me feel any better to keep out of the work. I'm just going on and do my best."

"Good," said Dan slowly.

"And, Dan, you don't know what a help you have been to me. You don't say much, but you're just as true as steel." Dan visibly flinched at the words of praise, but Walter was so filled with his own plans that he did not observe the action of his roommate. "Yes, sir, Dan, I tell you you have helped me a million times. You don't seem to feel as I do when——"

"That's enough," broke in Dan, "I'm no prodigy."

"You're the straightest fellow in the Tait School!"

"You don't know me."

"Then I guess nobody does."

"That's right too."

When the two boys entered their room they found an assembly of some of their classmates, who looked at Walter with eyes full of sympathy, and yet not knowing how to express their feelings. The awkward silence was broken by Walter himself, who spoke quietly and naturally as he greeted his friends.

"We're mighty glad to have you back," said Ned. "You're going to stay, aren't you?"

"I expect to," answered Walter. "Why?"

"We didn't know from the word you sent Dan but that you might not be coming back."

"Well, I'm here," said Walter lightly. "My term-bill for the first half of the year is paid, so I guess I'll stay and get my money's worth. My father was a mighty good business man, but you see he was the whole thing. We don't know yet whether he left enough for me to go on through school and college or not; but I'm not going to let a little thing like that stand in my way. A lot of good men have worked their way, and I guess I can do it too, if they did." Walter spoke so boldly that his audience apparently were much impressed both by his courage and confidence.

"I always knew you had the right stuff in you, Walter Borden," said Ned encouragingly.

"I'm not afraid," declared Walter, warming under the words of praise. "Of course it will be hard, but I guess that isn't the only hard thing I'll have to meet."

"Among others, the eleven of the Military Academy."

"You're right," responded Walter quickly. "Tell me about the team. Has the academy as heavy an eleven as they had last year? Who is their coach? How is our coach doing? Is he up to the game?"

Walter's questions served to relieve the tension, and in a brief time they were talking about the school life almost as if not one of the boys had ever had any interest in any other topic.

Dan Richards, however, was an exception. He seldom spoke, and when he did it was briefly.

"What's the matter with you, Dan?" asked Walter when the visitors had departed.

"Nothing."

"Well, all I can say then is that for a fellow who has nothing the matter with him you certainly have a queer way of showing it."

"Maybe it's my conscience that has gone wrong," suggested Dan with a smile.

"Your conscience never troubles you."

"Perhaps that's the very trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

"See here, Dan Richards, you've got something you're holding back! I never saw you act like this before."

"I told you that you didn't know me."

"What has gone wrong?"

"I can't say that anything has."

Walter shook his head as if he still was not convinced, but he did not again refer to the subject, at least until after several days had passed.

The lad's sorrow over the great loss that had come to him was manifest to all his friends, but as he seldom spoke of it the boys naturally made no mention of it, and in a brief time the routine of the school was resumed. Dan had promised Walter to wait two weeks before he did anything more concerning the matter of his purpose not to accept the aid which had been given him, and meanwhile it was agreed that the topic was not to be mentioned by him or by his roommate.

The work of the eleven now became more absorbing, and for some reason which Walter could not understand Dan was apparently devoted to the game. He did not neglect his studies, for Dan was a methodical and steady worker, but when he donned his football suit he threw himself into the game with even more apparent enthusiasm than he had ever shown in his work on the nine. He held frequent interviews with the coach and tried to work out several new plays.

The Tait School eleven was "coming along finely," as Walter expressed it. The one great game, however, was to be that with their rivals, the Military Academy at Franklin. All other games, in the eyes of the boys, were more or less preliminary to the final struggle.

Reports from the academy were becoming some-

what conflicting. One day the boys would read in the paper that many of the academy eleven were suffering from injuries and that the outlook was dark. Another day, however, the paper would be glowing in its praises for the team as the "best that ever had been put on the field by the Franklin Military Academy."

All these newspaper comments were eagerly read and much discussed by the boys of the Tait School, though Walter often declared in the presence of his fellows that "he didn't take very much stock in what the academy reported. Every year since he had been in school he had believed from the printed reports that about two-thirds of the eleven of the Military Academy had been severely injured, but when the game between the two schools was played the academy had provided the liveliest sort of injured men he had ever seen." And this sentiment now was generally accepted and held by the students of the Tait School.

Meanwhile the interest and excitement steadily increased, and when at last the day of the game arrived it was at fever heat.

The game was to be played on the grounds of the Tait School and great preparation had been made for it. Hundreds of visitors were expected and new songs had been practised, while the leaders of the cheering had developed new powers in the lungs of their respective sections.

At last the eventful day arrived.

CHAPTER X

THE GAME

IN spite of the fact that most of the boys who composed the Tait School eleven had had previous experience in athletic contests and had known what it was to play with hundreds of excited spectators watching their every movement and following every point, still the excitement attending the annual and closing contest of each school was shared by the players as well as by their supporters.

The day itself was ideal for the game. The air was clear and cold. The sun at times was behind the floating masses of November clouds, while the ground was firm and not yet slippery.

To three of the Tait players the excitement of the game was almost a relief. Walter was glad of the distraction for reasons some of his friends failed to understand. Dan was relieved not to be compelled to think of a certain promised essay with its reward of " thirty pieces of silver," while Watson was rejoicing for reasons that were the exact opposite of those which influenced his classmate.

The preliminary practice had now all been done, and the two teams were waiting for the whistle. The Tait School had the kick-off, and Watson was stoop-

ing low, and again and again he patted the earth or turned the ball slightly to one side or another. At last he had everything apparently arranged to his satisfaction, and as he arose he laughingly said in a low voice as he turned to Dan, "I wish I felt as sure of this game as I do of that prize for my essay."

Dan did not reply, though his face betrayed the instant change that came over him. A moment before he had been intensely interested in the stirring scenes about him. Now it almost seemed that "thirty pieces of silver" was an expression that was mingled in the noisy cries of the boys and their supporters. It was sounding in his ears and was a part of the chorus of the song which the Tait boys were boisterously singing as they watched and followed the movements of Sam Lothrop, the leader of the cheering.

Indeed Walter, who was quarter-back of the team, spoke twice to his roommate before the latter heard him, and even then apparently only in part comprehended what had been said to him. At that moment, however, the whistle sounded and Watson drew back to make his kick. Every Tait School player crouched, and, with eyes fixed upon the ball, prepared to dash down the field as soon as the center sent the ball toward their opponents' goal.

The ball almost seemed to leap like a thing alive when Watson kicked it. It was not high in the air, and was moving swiftly toward the academy's back field. Like a flash the Tait School boys followed,

and when one of the half-backs of the academy seized the ball, before he had gained anything, John Littlemouse was upon him, and the runner was thrown.

A shout almost as sharp as the report of a musket went up from the side filled with the friends of the Tait School at the dashing play, and when it was seen, as the teams lined up, that the ball was on the academy's fifteen-yard line, the shouting and commotion redoubled.

The coach of the Military Academy boys had drilled his pupils thoroughly in quick formations. In an astonishing brief time the signal was given by the quarter-back, and the ball was in the hands of the half-back. Clasping it tightly he made a dash for the right end of his opponents' line, but the formation was defective, and in spite of the runner's efforts he was thrown for a loss.

Before the tangled mass of players arose, a shout, followed by a prolonged cheer, came from the supporters of the Tait School: "That's the way! Hold 'em, Tait! Hold 'em, Tait!" came in long-drawn-out, rocket-like calls from the excited schoolboys.

The ball was quickly in play again, and this time a hard drive was made at Ned, who gave way slightly before the onslaught. The attack had not been expected, and consequently a hole in the opposing line had been made somewhat easily by the academy eleven. A gain of ten yards in this way was made.

The cheers of the spectators now were from the academy's friends, but many were rushing from their seats toward the ropes that had been strung a few yards from the side lines.

"Look out for a fake kick!" called Walter as the academy full-back dropped back a few yards and stood leaning forward with outstretched arms.

The warning was timely, although every boy was suspicious that a run instead of a kick was to be tried.

To the surprise of the Tait boys, however, the academy full-back kicked. The ball rose high in the air and Al Randall, the full-back of the Tait team, started for it. A groan was drowned in the cheer that followed when the ball bounded sharply to one side and Al failed to get it. As it slipped past him the noisy shouts and cries redoubled in volume when it was seen that two of the academy players were almost upon the elusive little oval. Al Randall, however, managed to fall upon the ball before his opponents could secure it, and the two opposing players now threw themselves heavily upon the prostrate Al. Watson and Dan, seizing the boys roughly, flung them to one side, and for a moment there were signs of trouble. The players were highly excited, the shouting of the spectators was almost deafening, and the first rough tactics of the game had appeared.

The ball was now in the hands of the Tait School eleven, and as they hastily lined up, once more

silence instantly rested over the field, so tense was the feeling of every one.

"Twenty-seven, four, six, ninety-one, thirty——" began Walter, as he leaned forward to receive the ball; then suddenly it was seen that it was in the possession of John Littlemouse, who was headed for the left end of the opponents' goal. The interference was excellent, and suddenly the fleet young Indian shot through the line, dodging, twisting, squirming, and yet pushing forward all the time. When the mass of players fell upon the runner the flags on the side lines showed that eight yards had been gained.

"Two to go, fellows!" called Walter to his men. "Look sharp now! Wake up!" he added, as he slapped Ned on his back. "Sixty-one, forty-four, fifty-five, twenty-two, sixteen——"

Dan knew that now he was expected to do his part, and as he reached forward to take the ball from Walter's hands the line suddenly seemed to separate into several revolving bodies. With all his strength Dan darted toward the small opening that had been made for him at right tackle. He was aware that much was expected of him, but the supreme desire was to get through the opening and gain the field behind the opposing line.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!" roared the academy contingent as the half-back was pushed, still clasping the ball, back two yards from that which the fleet Indian had won. Play was delayed two minutes to enable

Dan to recover the breath which had been squeezed out of him when the players had piled upon him.

Again the lines formed, and Walter sharply called the signals. For a moment there was confusion as it was seen that three of the academy players were eagerly in pursuit of Dan, who was crouching low and running swiftly toward the right end of the opposing line; but a moment later there were renewed shouts when it was discovered that the ball was in possession of John Littlemouse, and that the fleet-footed Indian was headed for the left end. The interference was better now, and before the spectators were aware just how it occurred, the little runner was speeding toward his opponents' goal-line with the most of the eleven in full pursuit.

"Run! Run!" came almost like a chorus from the side lines. Some of the younger boys, led by Carlton, were unitedly shouting, "How-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" attempting to imitate the war-whoop of the Indians. Still John Littlemouse sped forward. Before him were the fullback and one of the half-backs of his adversaries. He was so far in advance of his comrades, however, that it was impossible for him to be helped by any interference. As he approached the players who were running to meet his coming he swerved to the right and then to the left. A hoarse, wild shout arose when it was seen that he had eluded both and then speedily had passed them, and that not a player was between him and the coveted goal-line.

"Touch-down, Touch-down! How-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" a cry made shriller by the fact that the boys patted their lips with their hands as they emitted the fierce war-whoop. "Run! Run! Go it, Littlemouse!" were among the shouts that followed the swiftly running half-back of the Tait School.

So swift was the flight that the young Indian drew steadily away from the long line that was stretched out behind him. It did not seem possible that anything now could prevent a touch-down by the Tait School.

And then suddenly the unexpected happened. Just as John Littlemouse crossed the twenty-five-yard line, his foot slipped or turned, and he fell to the ground. Nor was that the worst, for as his pursuers flung themselves upon him, the ball was forced from his grasp, and almost before the astonished spectators were aware of what was occurring, one of the academy eleven, almost as fleet of foot as the Indian had been, was running madly down the field toward the Tait School goal.

Sharp cries and shouts of protest came from the onlookers, but Dan and Walter, who were in the advance of the straggling line that started in pursuit of the fleeing academy player, ran in vain. Neither Walter or Dan was able to overtake the speedy runner, and in a brief time the player ran behind the goal-posts and calmly seated himself, holding the football on the ground between his knees

while he mockingly smiled at the crestfallen Tait School players approaching.

"That was a great run," said Walter, crestfallen though he was by the failure to overtake the runaway.

The successful player laughed good-naturedly, speedily arose, and tossed the ball to his captain, while the chagrined, though still fighting Tait School eleven arranged themselves along the line beneath the goal. A hush fell over the great assembly when one of the academy players stretched himself upon the ground holding the ball in place, while the goal-kicker of his team twice changed the position of the ball slightly before he finally drew back and by a quick kick sent the ball squarely between the posts and above the bar.

A cheer as well defined as if all the spectators had been of one mind came from the bleachers, while the repeated and prolonged cheering students of the academy increased the enthusiasm of their team as much as it served to depress their rivals.

"What's the matter with you, Dan?" inquired Walter anxiously as he walked with his friend toward the goal they were trying to defend.

"Why?"

"Nothing; only somehow you don't seem to be in the game."

"What makes you think that?"

"You aren't putting in any ginger."

"I must try to do better."

"Keep your eyes open now. We aren't beaten yet, and half the battle is in keeping your nerve in operation. Oil the machinery a bit."

"I'll do my best."

"Watch out for the signals now. We'll try a new opening."

"Where?"

"Straight through center."

"Their center is a strong fellow."

"Never mind! We'll get him this trip!"

"What makes you so sure? We haven't tried their center once, have we?"

"Not yet."

"Then what makes you think you can get through there?"

"You'll see."

"First play?"

"No. I guess I'll run it off the second. You must keep your eyes open for it the first time we get the ball. A good deal will depend upon how quick you are. I may give the ball to you the first time we try and then have John Littlemouse hammer the same spot the very next play. Everything will depend upon your quickness. Keep your feet if you can manage it, for you may get a clear field. And if you do——"

Walter said no more, for the Tait School team was now taking its position to receive the kick-off of their opponents. Dan quickly moved across the field, but his thoughts were more of the plan Walter

had outlined for the attack upon center than of the actions of the opposing eleven. And he was seriously troubled as he recalled a conversation which had taken place several weeks before in his room concerning this very matter.

CHAPTER XI

THE SCORE

THE game was resumed with a determination and activity that did not seem possible after the strenuous efforts that had preceded the brief interval of rest. Each team was determined, but after a few minutes had elapsed Walter breathlessly whispered to Dan, when they chanced to be together after the ball had been run out of bounds, "Do you see what those fellows are after?"

"No; unless it's to win."

"They're six points to the good. Now, they aren't trying to score; they're just trying to keep us from scoring, that's all."

"What makes you think so?"

"They're just playing a defensive game. You watch, and you'll see it's just as I tell you."

"Well, they'll win if they can do that now."

"Of course they will. What's the matter with you, Dan? You talk almost as if you wanted them to win and that you didn't care much if they did. I never saw you play such a wooden game before in all my life. You hit the line as if you were trying to shake hands. Put some ginger in the game, old man."

"All right."

"We'll win if you do. Now look here, Dan; we're going to open up a hole through center, as I told you. I'll give you the signal, and it'll be about our only chance. You've just got to make it. Get through, and we're going to try desperately to get such interference for you that you can get around their left end. We've worked out the play mighty carefully, and if you'll make good we've got a chance left yet. The coach says that's our play now."

"All right," said Dan simply.

The lines were formed by this time, and for a few minutes Dan felt something of his old-time enthusiasm. He knew that the opposing line was a little stronger than that of the Tait School, but that the latter had slightly swifter ends, and that one of the half-backs was fleeter than any player had as yet shown himself to be on the academy team. He realized too, that there was some truth in his roommate's statement that he had not thrown himself into the game with all his might. Dan, aware of the justice of the complaint, held himself in readiness as he crouched low, listening for the signal.

"One, one hundred, one thousand, ninety-one, seventy-one, sixty-one!" called Walter.

Suddenly the ball was snapped back and the formation shot toward the right end, but there was a sudden stop when Dan received the ball and, backed by three of his teammates, dove headforemost through center.

The blow was powerful, and Dan staggered a moment and then suddenly was aware that he was through the line. Stumbling forward, he somehow regained his foothold and instantly, with Walter, Ned, and Al Randall close behind him, he was running swiftly for the left end. He was dimly aware of the sudden shout of approval from the spectators that greeted his unexpected success. He was also conscious that he had good interference. As he approached the opposing players, doing his utmost to circle the clever left end, he perceived that his interference was helping him wonderfully. Then in a moment, though just how it all occurred he afterward was unable to recall, he found himself past the end running at full speed toward the goal with practically a clear field before him.

There was a wild cheer which speedily became a prolonged and wild cry with his increasing speed. Nearer and nearer came the distant goal-posts.

The runner swerved slightly to the right as he saw two of the opposing players swiftly approaching him, running diagonally across the field. He was driven still farther when another player was seen coming swiftly toward him. The wild shouts were still more noisy as he crossed the twenty-five-yard line, but he was being steadily driven toward a corner of the field. Would he be able to cross the line?

The question was in the mind of every spectator as the entire body arose. Even the cheering ceased

for the moment, as excitedly the great assembly almost held its breath in its intense interest.

And then at that very moment Dan was tackled and thrown heavily to the ground. A shout of exultation broke from the lips of the friends of the academy, but it was answered by a prolonged cheer for Richards that instantly came from the supporters of the Tait School. The cheer, however, was speedily changed to a wild shout of anger as at that moment one of the heaviest of the academy players ran and threw himself upon Dan, who had not yet arisen. Not satisfied, the academy player was striving to drive Dan's head into the ground as he rolled himself backward and forward upon it.

Over the ropes leaped a score or more of the excited Tait School boys, who started with savage cries of anger across the field to the defense of their schoolmate. These were followed by others, and for a moment the fear of a riot was intensified, because, seeing what the friends of their opponents were doing, almost as many of the academy boys leaped from their seats to rush to the aid of their player.

Hastily several of the teachers ran to the scene and, before anything more than cries of anger were heard and some violent threatenings were made, succeeded in sending the excited schoolboy partisans from the field.

"That's the dirtiest football seen on this field in many a day!" exclaimed Walter angrily.

"Never mind," said Dan soothingly to his roommate, "I'm still alive."

"You fellows ought to know what dirty football is," declared one of the academy players. "Look at this," he added as he led forward the center of the academy eleven. The player's eyes were red and his face looked as if it had been rubbed by sandpaper.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded Walter with a grin.

"You know what it is. You're the last man to talk about dirty football. Your center grabbed both his hands full of dirt and rubbed them in Eaton's eyes. That's what he did."

Dan turned instantly to Watson, and as soon as he looked at him he knew that the charge was true. The trick which he himself had denounced had been used, no doubt, he thought, at the suggestion of the coach. He was very angry, and for a moment forgot the scratches on his own face.

The two head-masters, after a hasty conference, now approached the boys, and one of them said: "Both teams have been about equally at fault. We are willing to make allowances for the excitement, but neither school will stand for such work. The only condition under which we are willing that the game shall go on is that the rules shall be strictly enforced, and the first player seen using unfair or foul tactics shall be ruled out of the game. Is that understood?" he added as he turned for an answer from each team.

"We'll take our chances if the other fellows will," responded Walter a little sheepishly, although he grinned as he glanced at Hall, the captain of the academy eleven.

"Football isn't a game for mollycoddles," said Hall. "We haven't any fault to find, and if the other fellows can stand it we won't squeal."

"That has nothing to do with the case," declared the teacher sternly. "We are agreed," he added, turning to his friend, "and simply mean what we say. If there is a repetition of the tactics we have seen, the player will be ordered from the field, no matter to which eleven he belongs. If that does not prove to be sufficient, then the game will be called. Do you agree?" he added, turning to Walter.

"I suppose I'll have to," replied Walter, winking at Dan and John Littlemouse as he spoke.

"And do you agree, Hall?" he added, turning to the rival captain.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well," said the teacher, and he at once returned to his seat, while the field was cleared for the continuance of the game.

"That was all right," said Walter to Dan and John. "Those old boys gave us a chance to get our breath. We'll send you on the same trip you made before, Dan. You've had a good rest, and you ought to gain ten yards this time. I may make it a straight attack, and not try a fake run around right end. The left end is the soft spot. Don't be afraid

to use your hands. They're good and hard, and I'd about as soon be hit by most men's feet as to feel the weight of your horny palm. Look sharp now! We're going to make an opening again right through their center."

As the two lines stood facing each other a silence that was intense fell upon the entire assembly. Every one was aware of the importance of the next play. First down might still leave other chances, but the marvelous run which Dan had made was in the minds of all, and somehow they were watching for a repetition of that or for some other trick equally effective. Walter began to call out the signals slowly. He was standing with his hand on the thigh of the stooping center, and looking about him as if he was undecided what plan to adopt or to whom to give the ball.

Before any of the spectators fully were aware that the ball was in play there was a shift, and four of the Tait School boys started for the right end, but the center of the academy eleven was having troubles as Dan saw when he seized the ball and a moment later turned his back as he whirled about with the ball clasped tightly in his arms and pushed with all his strength against the line.

To his surprise the center seemed to give way, with only a weak attempt to stop him. Dan almost fell as he found that his way was not blocked, and then righting himself in a moment he dashed at full speed once more toward the left.

Manifestly the academy boys had been taken off their guard, not expecting an immediate repetition of the play that before had secured such a long gain for their opponents. Because of this fact the Tait School was about to secure a fresh advantage, but as Dan dodged and ran, suddenly time was called, as it was seen that the center of the academy eleven was writhing on the ground.

Dan was one of those who instantly ran to his relief, and as he stooped to lift the fallen player the latter whispered hoarsely, "Don't say a word about it."

"About what?"

"Just say I'm winded. I'll be all right again in a few minutes."

Other boys gathered so quickly about the fallen player that Dan was unable to say any more and, after a delay of two minutes, play was resumed, though the face of the player for whom time had been taken was ghastly as he walked back to his position in the line.

"What was the matter with him, Walter?" asked Dan in a low voice.

"Squeezed," replied Walter dryly.

"How?"

"I did it with my little paddies. My, he was soft."

"Did the coach tell you to do that?"

"Yes; he said give it to him 'good and plenty.'"

"And you did?"

"I did. Why? What's wrong about that? Having some more of your heart trouble, Dan?" laughed his roommate. "It's just a question of which shall get there first, that's all."

Before Dan could say more the boys lined up and the game was resumed.

It was not safe again to attempt the play which had twice been made, and consequently Al Randall was called upon to take the ball and hammer away at the unfortunate center once more. This time, however, the line of the academy so reenforced the attacked player that in the scrimmage the ball was fumbled and lost by the Tait School.

The cheering and shouts of the academy were redoubled at the misplay, which brought them a much-needed advantage. Promptly their full-back kicked, the ball was recovered in the middle of the field, but the runner was unable to advance, as he was thrown in his tracks.

The defensive game was now resumed by the academy eleven, and greatly to their advantage, for the Tait School was not able to gain again. Indeed, during most of the remaining part of the game the ball was in the hands of the academy. Two wild rushes were made, and each time the ball was kicked, their opponents' gain being so slight that not once was the goal threatened.

So the score remained six to nothing, and when time finally was called the academy had won. With shrieks and cheers the supporters of the victorious

eleven rushed upon the field. They moved across it in weird dances or clasped hands and swung in and out in wide circles; they lifted their players upon their shoulders or ran in streams under the goal-post and recklessly tossed their hats over the cross-bar, where they were trampled by their onrushing comrades.

Dan and Walter stood soberly watching the wild sight from the dressing-room. Suddenly the latter said, as his voice choked, "Dan, how did it happen?"

"They had a better eleven."

"They didn't," said Walter hotly.

"What was it then?"

"That's what I want the coach to tell me," said Walter, as he turned away to look for the coach of their team.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER THE GAME

DAN did not go with his roommate, but at once started for his room. Indeed, he was somewhat more downcast than ever he had been in his short life. The problem of how he was to remain in school was still unsolved. He had merely put off the evil day by silently consenting to Walter's suggestion to wait. Waiting had not been productive of results, unless his feeling of restlessness had been one of them. Besides, Dan was a good deal troubled by the game which was now ended. He had been fully aware that he had not played with his customary fire, though he was partly at a loss to understand the cause. The support of the team had been unusually strong, the field itself was in excellent condition, the players all had been loyal, and their opponents, he was convinced, were not so formidable as to be very greatly feared.

And yet the academy eleven had won. That score of six to nothing was not to be discounted or denied. But how was it? Why was it? Dan recalled the questionable tricks which the coach had taught the boys and the latter had done their best to use that afternoon. As far as the young half-back was

aware, the academy eleven had played a straight game for the most part. What little trouble had arisen came mainly from the zeal and excitement of the young players. What, then, was the trouble? Why had the game been lost when there could be no question (at least there was none in Dan's mind) that the Tait School team in the last analysis was the stronger?

"Don't be glum, old man. The best team in the world has to take its medicine once in a while. It will do us good."

Dan looked up hastily at the words and saw his classmate, Watson, beside him. For some reason his presence at the time was sharply irritating, though not even Dan could have given a reason for the sudden change in his feelings.

"I'm not giving up."

"Nobody said you were. That was a great run you made this afternoon."

"Was it?"

"Don't you know it was?"

"I am thinking of the one I didn't make."

"There's no good in thinking of that."

"That doesn't help any."

"Well, it'll help to stop thinking about what you didn't do. If we all were to think and talk about what we might, could, would, or should have done, we'd all be what my father calls 'subjunctive' men."

"What are they?"

"Why, the men who might, could, would, or should——"

"But don't?" interrupted Dan with a laugh.

"That's it. My father says we ought to be 'indicative' men."

"What are they?"

"I am, I will, I have, and I don't know what all. You know more about it than I do. Say, Dan, how is the essay coming on?"

"Which essay?"

"Why, the one you promised to write for me. You don't mean to say——"

"I don't mean to say anything," broke in Dan testily.

"You're not going back on your promise, are you?" demanded Watson, aghast.

"I don't usually, do I?"

"No, you don't; but you gave me a jolt."

"What will you take to let me off?"

"And not write anything?"

"That's it."

"I wouldn't let you off for any amount of money."

"Fifty dollars?"

"No, not for a hundred times fifty. I've just got to have that essay, Dan! My father is expecting it, and I've told him I was going to hand one in."

"Did you tell him who is writing it?"

"Of course not! What do you take me for?"

"I wish you'd let me off," pleaded Dan.

"Got all the money you want?" inquired Watson quizzically.

"No," replied Dan, his voice quickly betraying his anxiety.

"That's what I thought. I've got another scheme for you, Dan."

"I don't want any more. One is enough."

"Oh, yes, you will—when you hear it."

"What is it?"

"I know a half dozen or more fellows whose 'themes' you can write."

"Can I?"

"Yes, sir, you can. You'll get two or three dollars apiece. If you write three or four, or maybe five or six a week, you'll be sure of a pretty good thing."

Dan's laugh was noisy and not very hearty. "Watson," he said, "did you ever hear of the man who made thirty pieces of silver in a few minutes?"

"No; who was he?"

"Judas."

"Judas who?" asked Watson innocently.

Dan stared blankly at his classmate and then laughed again, and this time his laughter was hearty as well as noisy. "I think his name was Mr. Iscariot," he said.

"Where does he live?"

"He has been dead some time."

"How did he die?"

"Committed suicide—for thirty pieces of silver."

"Cheap enough!"

"That's more than some men get."

"I don't know what you mean. Don't you think I'm giving you enough?"

"More than it's worth, Watson," said Dan soberly.

"You don't need to kick if I don't," declared Watson, manifestly relieved by the knowledge that whatever Dan might mean by his strange words, apparently he had no intention of not fulfilling his promise.

Though he was uninvited, Watson kept on beside Dan and went with him to his room.

It was not long before Walter, accompanied by Ned, John Littlemouse, Al Randall, and little Carlton, the hero-worshiper, also entered, and the general air of disgust or dejection was manifest in all.

"What's the use?" grumbled Walter as he flung his hat upon his desk and seated himself. "We had a better team—and yet we lost."

"No use crying over spilt milk," said Al soberly.

"True, novel, inspiring, original, not to be disputed, consoling, heating, cooling, weakening, strengthening——"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Al, breaking in sharply.

"Keep cool, fellows!" suggested Ned. "There is only one reason why we lost. I think if we'd played good straight, hard football, instead of trying the coach's tricks, we——"

"You didn't half squeeze that fellow, Watson," broke in Walter.

"You ask him," replied Watson grimly.

"Did he say anything when you rubbed the dirt in his eyes?"

"Not for publication," laughed Watson.

"And yet we couldn't get across their line," said Ned. "I thought we were going to twice—once before the ninth little Indian got run out of bounds in the first half and the other time when old Dan, here, made his run diagonally across the field."

"If Dan had put a little more ginger into his work and a little more strength into his good right arm, when he was keeping the academy fellows away, he'd have won out and we'd have had the game," said Walter disconsolately.

"What was the matter with you, Dan?" asked Ned quickly.

"I couldn't run fast enough to keep out of the way of——"

"Say you didn't run fast enough and you'd be nearer the truth," broke in Walter harshly.

"All right. I didn't run fast enough then," acknowledged Dan.

"Well, why didn't you?"

"I guess I looked back to see what the academy center was doing when his eyes were full of the dust that Watson had rubbed in them."

"Do you mean that, Dan?" inquired Al Randall abruptly.

"Why not?"

"I don't know," said Al slowly. "If you really

did anything of that kind it wouldn't be so bad after all."

"Oh, no; just lose us the game, that's all," suggested Walter almost fiercely.

"And that is enough," said Dan.

"You're right it is," retorted Walter. "Between Dan's falling down and Watson not being on his job——"

"You ask that fellow whose eyes I filled full whether I was located on my special opportunity or not, and you may receive a different impression. Oh, what's the use, fellows? We lost the game and it's all past now."

"I'm glad we lost if we had to stoop to low-down tricks to win," said Al.

"It seems to me we stooped to what you call low-down tricks and yet didn't win after all," suggested Dan.

"You fellows don't know what you're talking about," interrupted Walter.

"Our game was all fair enough; it was as fair as theirs anyway," suggested Dan.

"Don't try to put on too many airs, Dan," retorted Walter. "People that live in glass houses mustn't throw stones, you understand."

"What do you mean?" demanded Dan, his eyes blazing. "I never stooped to such a dirty trick."

"Not that, but you may try some others."

"What others?"

"Oh, ask Watson," said Walter sneeringly.

"Ask him what?"

"What he knows about——"

"Keep still!" roared Watson. "You've talked too much already."

"I sha'n't keep still! Whose room is this, anyway?" shouted Walter, now thoroughly enraged. "I'll put every one of you out!"

CHAPTER XIII

AN INTERRUPTION

THE angry boy started as if he was about to carry out the threat he had made, but before he did any damage he was seized by Ned and Dan and was helpless in their hands. At a nod from Dan the former quietly followed the departing boys and the two roommates were left to themselves. Walter's face was working convulsively, but he made no further attempt at violence.

For a time both were silent, Dan quietly and somewhat curiously watching his roommate.

"Look somewhere else, can't you!" snapped Walter at last.

"Look here, you don't know what you are saying——"

"All right, I don't," interrupted Walter submissively. "I don't know what's the matter with me anyway."

"I do," said Dan soothingly.

"What?"

"You're a wreck after the game. Don't try to see any of the boys to-night——"

"Try to see," broke in the troubled lad. "Why, man alive, that is the very last thing I want. What

a fix I'm in!" he added almost with a whimper. "They all expected me to win, and I thought surely we would too. But we didn't."

"No, and we didn't deserve to win."

"You mean Watson's pinching the academy center?"

"Yes, and his rubbing his hands full of dust and dirt in his eyes."

"Bah! You're green at the business, Dan. Honestly, isn't this the first year you ever played?"

"I wish it was the last too."

"You're too straight, Dan. Everybody knows that you wouldn't be turned out of the way for anything, but you'll have to admit that you're not like most of the fellows. They aren't as strait-laced as you are. You see, the things that appeal to most of the fellows don't appeal to you at all. It would seem just about as strange for most of the team—I don't care whether it's our team or the academy's—not to take every advantage we can. But everybody expects you to be different, Dan. You aren't made that way. The things that tempt most of the fellows don't appeal to you at all. You aren't like the rest of us. Now don't find any more fault with us just because we are not like you——"

"Don't," broke in Dan.

"What's the matter? Sick? You look as pale as——"

"No, I'm not sick, but don't talk any more of that stuff."

"All right."

"And I want, if you're not too dead tired, to talk out that other thing to-night, and——"

"What other thing?" said Walter in surprise.

"About money."

"What money?"

"You know what I mean, the money your father paid for me here."

"Well, what about it?"

"I can't take it."

"You have taken it."

"But I can pay it back."

"How?"

"Work and earn it—the same as others do."

"You can't 'pay' it if my mother and I won't take it."

"You have no right to talk that way. You——"

"Go ahead, old man," interrupted Walter in a different tone of voice. "Let me hear what you've got to say on the subject."

"You can't pay my schooling now; you say so yourself."

"Don't have to—it's paid up."

"Half the year was paid for," said Dan quietly.

"What?" demanded Walter, sitting instantly erect. "Is that all? How do you know? Is that the way it is with me too?"

"Yes. I looked it up in the office."

"You're sure about it?"

"That is what they told me there."

Walter was silent a moment before he spoke again. If you're right, Dan—and I'll find out about it—that hits me as well as you pretty hard. My mother thinks the year is all paid."

"It isn't."

"No, I suppose it isn't since you say so. Now what do you intend to do?"

"Go to work."

"And leave school?"

"Not unless I have to. You see, if you or your mother don't need right away the money your father has paid out for me, I thought I'd like to pay that later. Of course, if you need it——"

"Go on with your tale," suggested Walter as his roommate hesitated.

"If you need it you have a perfect right to have it, and I'll go to work and get it."

"How?"

"I'll find something to do."

"On the farm?"

"No; there isn't money enough there."

"Where will you go? To the city?"

"That's where everybody goes when he wants money, isn't it?"

"Now you sit up and listen to me! Do you know how much you can earn a week in New York? Of course you don't. You'd get about four dollars a week. That's right," Walter added emphatically, as Dan started to protest. "That's what my father paid boys when they began, and he said that was

exactly four dollars a week more than they were worth. They didn't know a thing about the business. Now, Dan, if you get four dollars a week and pay anywhere from six to ten for board besides your luncheon every day, your trolley fares, your clothes, church dues, and odds and ends, how long will it take to pay up the back money?"

"But some get more than that."

"Oh, yes, some do—after a while if they don't die in the making. My father used to say that ninety-nine boys out of every hundred that left the farm for the city made a huge mistake; but because about one in a hundred managed to strike it rich, all the young fellows of the neighborhood thought that all they had to do was to go down to the city and they'd be the ones to succeed. See?"

"Some of them have succeeded."

"Oh, yes; but the city is just full of young fellows who haven't and are trying to live on four dollars a week. They've got to start at about that, you know."

"Who told you this?"

"My own father."

"Was he from the country?"

"No, but my mother was. You know that though, without my telling you. My father said that if most of the country boys who went to the city would stay at home and work as hard as they would have to in the city, use their brains and be willing to make just a quarter of what they do in a job in town they'd

make a lot more money and be a million times happier."

"How many times happier?"

"Several," laughed Walter, who, for the moment at least, seemingly had forgotten his disappointment over the result of the contest with the academy eleven.

"You think I'd better go back to the farm? I thought you, and your father too, wanted me to go to school."

"We did—I do. And that is just it."

"I don't see."

"You must go on through school and to college too. You'll have to get ready if you want to fill a good place. There are plenty of cheap men for every 'tupenny' position." Walter was talking so earnestly that he almost persuaded himself that he felt what he was saying.

"That's all right. It's very beautiful. I can't, according to your story, earn any money at first if I go to work. But how am I going to go to school and college without any money? That is about as clear as your story of the fellow who gets four dollars a week and then pays six or eight for his board. I don't see it myself."

"It's easy."

"How?"

"Borrow the money."

Dan laughed derisively.

"I mean it," protested Walter.

"I don't doubt that," admitted Dan; "but you forgot to tell me who would lend me the money, even if I wanted to go in debt—which I'm not sure I do."

"Anybody will lend it to you."

"Just mention one or two, will you?" laughed Dan good-naturedly.

"Haven't you got an uncle?"

"Yes, two of them."

"Well, ask one of them to do it."

"One hasn't his farm paid for, and the other I haven't seen since I was four years old."

"Has he any money?"

"If he has, he has concealed the fact mighty successfully. There's only one way I can do it."

"What is that?"

"Find some work."

"What kind of work?"

"Any kind."

"Tutoring?"

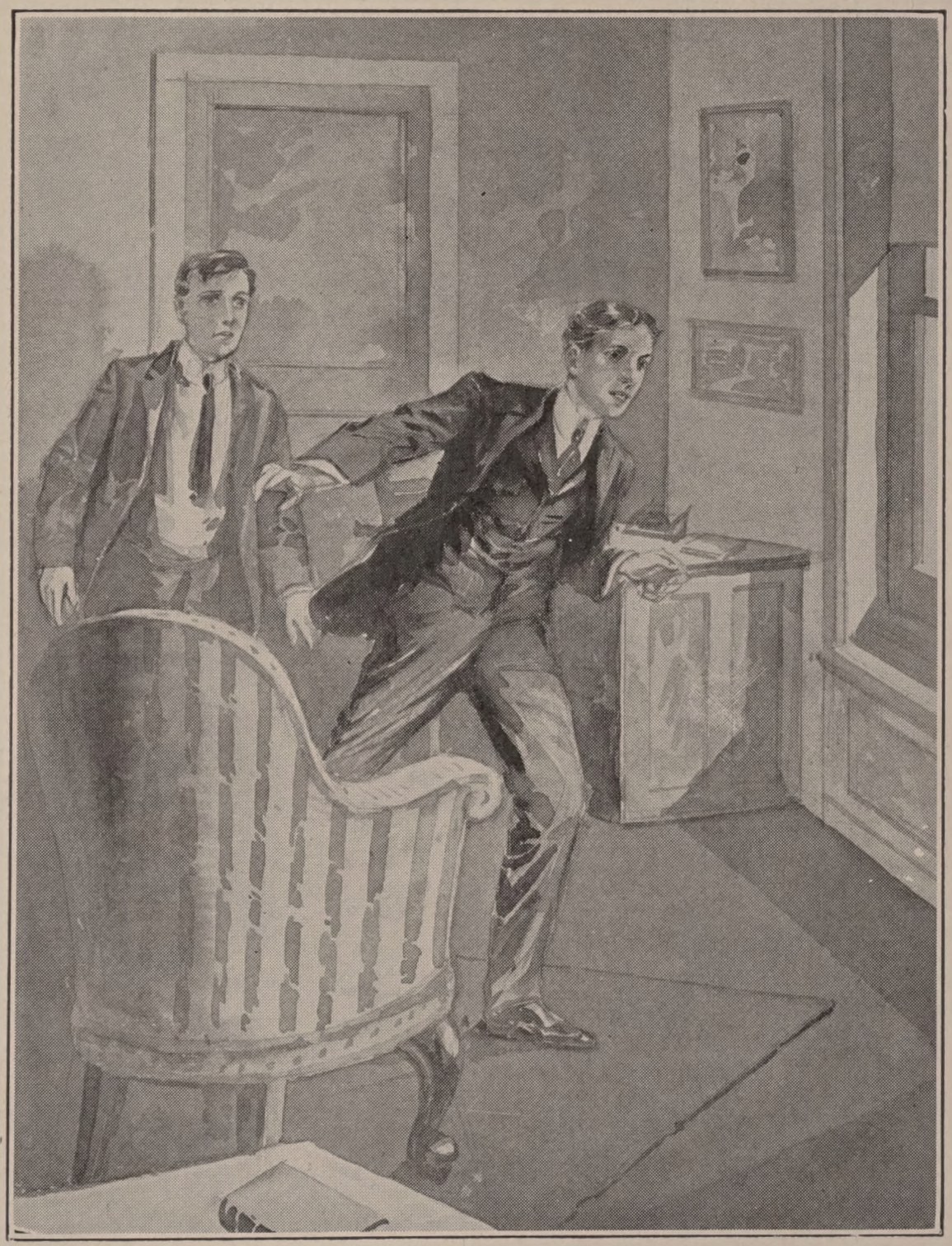
"That's one kind; then there is looking after furnace-fires, shoveling snow, taking care of horses, and some other things."

"Would you do those things, Dan?" inquired Walter soberly.

"Of course I would."

"You're a great fellow, Dan," said Walter earnestly. "I wish I was just half as true as you are."

"Don't say that! You know but a mighty little about me."



" Both boys . . . ran to the window "

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"I know you're true blue," asserted Walter earnestly.

"Don't talk any more about it."

"All right. You'll fix up this matter of staying in the school somehow. I know you will. Let me know if I can help any."

"That is like you."

"Like me—at certain times, and then again it isn't. Ask Ned and Al about me."

"I have no need to ask them. You have been a good friend to me. Some day'll I'll try to show you that I don't forget, even if I do lose a game once in a while."

"The game is gone. You'll show them in the springtime, gentle Annie!"

"If I am here."

"You'll be here all right. Hark! What's that racket?"

Both boys leaped from their seats and ran to the window as Walter spoke. In a moment, however, each seized his cap and, dashing at full speed down the stairway, ran toward the place where the cause of the excitement appeared.

CHAPTER XIV

CARLTON SEEKS HELP

IN the center of the school campus stood a statue of the founder of the school. When Walter and Dan drew near the assembly that had gathered about the marble figure they discovered that great streaks of black paint had been daubed upon the face of the stone man, while a placard in huge letters, also of black, proclaimed the defeat of the school eleven by that of the Military Academy team—the score of "0-6" having been printed on the cardboard that was suspended from the neck.

Many of the boys in the assembly were laughing and others were somewhat excitedly talking about who the parties were that had been guilty of desecrating the marble image of the original Tait.

"Come up, Walter, and shed a tear," said Carlton gleefully, as he caught sight of the captain of the school eleven approaching the group. "Tait has gone into mourning! Hi, there," the excited boy shouted to a group near-by, "cry louder! Hit it up! Make the campus howl! Now, then, all together!" At the boy's word a groan and then a prolonged wail followed, but as the boys soon began to laugh the "ululation" speedily ceased.

"Who did that?" demanded Walter sharply of Carlton.

Before the latter could reply Ned said: "Is this the little Carlton that Gus Kiggins used to kick up and down stairs last year? My, but the infant has grown since then!"

"Never you mind me," spoke up Carlton unabashed. "I guess I know a thing or two, and some besides now."

"What do you know about this, Carlton?" demanded Dan sternly.

"Not much," replied the boy somewhat abashed.

"Did you do it?"

"I'm not going to tell who did it; or I wouldn't tell if I knew."

"Look at the band of mourning they have painted around the old boy's arm," remarked Ned with a laugh.

"Isn't that immense?" chuckled Carlton, proud to find himself in the company of the older boys.

"And look at the black eyes too," he added. "I guess I'll have to start up the boys again on their 'ululation.'"

"Where did you find that word?" asked Walter sharply.

"Don't you like it?" retorted Carlton.

"Doesn't make any difference whether I like it or not. Where did you get it?"

"It doesn't make any difference, either, where I got it."

"You young rascal!" began Walter, attempting to seize the boy; but before he could lay his hand on him the lad was gone, vanishing in the assembly.

"Who would believe the frightened little imp could ever have developed into such a terror?" said Walter. "Dan, he was under your special protection last year. Are you the one who has set him up to these tricks?"

"I haven't seen him half a dozen times this fall," replied Dan.

"That accounts for his fall then," said Ned.

"Who did this outrage?" said Dan, pointing once more to the disfigured statue.

"I didn't. Don't look at me in that tone of voice," replied Ned promptly. "The boys certainly did the job up brown," he added with a laugh. "Look at those eyes. They look as if they had been crying ink. And that band of black on the arm!"

"It was enough to make a stone dog howl, to say nothing of a man," said Walter. "We lost that game——"

"Please do not say that again," growled Ned. "Don't you suppose we know that we lost it? Even this stone image of the first of all the Taits is weeping tears of ink. It's bad enough without having it rubbed in."

"We lost that game," repeated Walter, unmoved by his friend's bantering. "It was the fault of——"

"Oh, don't take too much on yourself," interrupted Ned. "We all know you are unduly modest,

but really, you know, some of the rest of us helped lose it. Here's old Dan for example. If he had run a little harder and not acted as if his leaden heart or copper conscience was holding him back, he'd have turned the left end, dodged the whole team, and made a touch-down. But he didn't; so what's the use of groaning and growling?"

"We lost that game," resumed Walter, "and the whole school is up in arms."

"Not half as much as they will be when the lads that painted John Tait, the original, go up to see Soc and Doc. They'll wish they had never been born. That's you, you little imp incarnate!" Ned added sharply as Carlton once more appeared.

"I didn't do anything," protested the boy.

"I'm glad you didn't."

"All I've got to say is that if you did do it," said Dan, "you'd better go straight to the office and own up."

"You never do anything, Dan, so you're safe," laughed Ned.

"He'd do that though, if he had anything on his conscience," declared Walter.

"Well, I guess he would," admitted Ned. "He's a great old Dan."

But for some reason, which none of his friends comprehended, Dan turned away at once and went back to his room.

"What's the trouble with Dan?" asked Ned, as he thoughtfully watched his departing classmate.

"He's troubled about money," said Walter as the boys withdrew from the scene.

"What money?"

"To pay his term bills. He says he's going to stay and earn it."

"What's wrong? Family lost?"

"I can't tell you all the details, but I know what I'm talking about. It would be a big loss to the nine if he should leave school."

"What can be done?"

"That's what's troubling me," answered Walter thoughtfully. "We don't want to lose him, but I haven't any money now——"

"Yes, I know," broke in Ned; "but some of the rest of us have—at least our fathers have, and they would be willing to help."

"Dan would never take it."

"Can't we think up some scheme—find some way to have him paid, or something?"

"For what?"

"That's just what I'd like to find out."

"When you do, you let me know," said Walter as he left his classmate.

For two days the "outrage of the painted statue," as the principal of the Tait School, Doctor Stevens, called the disfiguration of the marble statue of the founder, was the chief topic of conversation among the boys. If the teachers knew who the guilty parties were, they did not disclose their knowledge, nor did they state what would be done. The very

uncertainty itself tended to strengthen the confusion in the minds of the student body, most of whom condemned the mischief-makers in strong terms.

"Say, Dan, when can I see you?"

Dan Richards turned sharply about as he was entering the dormitory in which his rooms were located, and saw Carlton wistfully looking up into his face.

There was something in the expression on Carlton's face which at once appealed to the older boy, and he said, "Come right up to my room now."

"Is anybody there? Where's Walter?" inquired Carlton anxiously.

"Gone home over Sunday with Ned."

"All right then, I'll come," responded the lad promptly as he followed his friend up the stairs.

"Now out with it! What made you paint that statue?" demanded Dan when they were seated in his room.

"How did you know that I had anything to do with that trick?"

"That doesn't make any difference. Tell me your story."

"I didn't paint it."

"What did you do?"

"All I did—I know who did the painting, that's all I——"

"How do you know?"

"I heard——"

"Then if you didn't do the job and just heard who did, the only thing for you to do is to keep so still that——"

"But Soc says if I don't tell he'll report me as one of the boys——"

"Who says he'll do that?" interrupted Dan sharply.

"Soc."

"Now tell me again just what he said."

"The way it happened was this—he's been asking the fellows in our class one at a time if he did it, and if he said he didn't do it, he'd ask him if he knew who did."

"And you told him you knew who did the painting?"

"Yes. It was——"

"Don't tell me. I don't want to know. One of the teachers has asked me the same question that Soc asked you. If I don't know I shall be all right."

"All right," assented Carlton; "I won't if you don't want me to, but you tell me what I'm to tell Soc."

"Maybe you don't know."

"Maybe I do know——" broke in Carlton.

"You mustn't believe everything you hear——"

"I don't! What do you take me for?"

"Last year you were mighty green."

"So were you."

"I guess you're right," said Dan good-naturedly,

as he looked again at the boy. Could this really be little Carlton Hall, who less than a year ago was tormented by his classmates, the special butt of Gus Kiggins?

"But what am I going to do about it?" repeated the younger boy.

"Soc won't do what you say he will."

"The fellows say he will."

"Well, you might tell him what you are so sure you know and then let him be the judge."

"What? You don't want me to tell on the fellows, do you?"

"Perhaps you don't know."

"But I do know just who did it."

"How do you know?"

"Because. To—because the fellows who did the job wanted me to go in with them."

"Why didn't you?" asked Dan quizzically.

"I didn't—well, I sha'n't tell you why, but I didn't."

"Are you sure the fellows who wanted you to go in with them are the ones who did it?"

"They said they did."

"When did they tell you they did? Was it before or after the school found it out?"

"Before—and after too."

"And they told you that they were the ones that did it, you say?"

"Why, yes."

"Did they threaten you if you told?"

"Yes," replied Carlton, in some confusion.

"I see," said Dan thoughtfully.

"But I wouldn't tell anyway!" protested Carlton.

"Yes, I see," said Dan again slowly. "I'll tell you what to do," he added hastily, as he arose and locked the door into the hall.

CHAPTER XV

AN UNEXPECTED CALLER

BEFORE Dan could explain, however, and even before he seated himself a sharp rap on the door compelled him to open it again, and he saw the teacher, Mr. Blackman, whom all the boys called "Scippie," standing before him.

"Good evening, Richards," said the visitor formally. "I wish to have a little private conversation with you if you are not otherwise engaged."

"Come in, Mr. Blackman," replied Dan quietly.

As the teacher entered the room and saw Carlton there he hesitated a moment before he said: "This conversation is of a strictly private nature, Richards. If it is not convenient now I shall call some other time."

"Perfectly convenient now," responded Dan promptly. Then turning to Carlton he said, "Run home, sonny. You can come and play with me some other day."

"Not at all! Not at all!" interposed the more recent visitor.

"You do as I tell you," continued Dan, speaking again in a low voice to the lad, who already was preparing to slip out of the room.

"You have great influence over the younger boys," said Mr. Blackman when Carlton was gone and he had taken the chair which Dan had pushed forward for his unexpected visitor.

"Have I?"

"That is quite manifest," remarked the teacher after one or two slightly nervous "Ahems."

Dan looked curiously at his visitor. He had had a recitation with the man every school day since he had entered the Tait School. Mr. Blackman was a slight man, who wore small side-whiskers in keeping with his frail body. He was an excellent scholar, but for some reason had never been popular with the boys, though he usually was kind in his spirit and manifestly was desirous of being liked by his students. "Too anxious" was Walter's brutal explanation of the reason why "Scippie" was "not among the teachers most beloved," though all his active life had been given the Tait School since his student days. Sometimes Walter referred to him as "Miss Nancy." "Why doesn't he just make us toe the mark?" Walter had at one time demanded. "That's the only kind of a teacher the fellows have any use for. Scippie shows he is too anxious to have the boys like him. Now Mr. Low, who has our geometry, he doesn't seem to think of anything but making the fellows know all about every angle and square in the work. And yet there aren't five fellows in the class who don't think he is about the best man on the list."



" Mr. Blackman . . . had never been popular with the boys "

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Dan somehow was thinking of these comments of his roommate while he was curiously regarding his visitor and wondering what had brought him to his room on this unexpected visit.

"As I was about to say," resumed Mr. Blackman, "there is a prevalent, not to say a predominant, feeling among the teachers that there is not a boy in the Tait School who has the influence among his fellow students that you have."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Blackman. I wish it was true."

"It is true. That is the chief cause for my visit."

Dan was silent as he curiously watched the man.

"To come directly to the point," resumed Mr. Blackman, "I wish to inquire how you and your friends look upon the painting of the marble statue of the foremost donor to our school—ahem—indeed, I may say the greatest benefactor the Tait School ever had? What do you think of the defacement of it?"

"We all think it was a shame and an outrage," said Dan quietly.

"Precisely. I was confident that would be your personal feelings in the matter."

"It is," said Dan simply.

"That being the state of the case, I am sure you will agree with me in a proposition I wish to lay before you. Briefly, it is as follows," continued the visitor after he apparently had waited a moment for Dan to speak: "My own suspicion is so strongly

drawn to a certain student as the perpetrator of the outrage that I am constrained to place the matter before you for your judgment."

"Before me?" exclaimed Dan in surprise.

"Yes, before you."

"I don't know anything about the scrape. The first I heard of it was when I looked out of our window and heard a crowd of fellows yelling out around the monument. Then Walter and I went out to see what the trouble was. That's all I know, I can assure you."

"Say, rather, it was all you knew at that time." There was an expression of slyness or cunning on the face of his visitor that at another time would have caused Dan to laugh—it was so thoroughly out of place. The man was so mild and gentle that such action as that which his expression implied was practically impossible for him successfully to assume.

"Now I am speaking in the strictest confidence," began the teacher again, and then he paused for Dan to express his assent.

"You will hold in confidence what I have to say?" repeated Mr. Blackman.

"If you want me to, but——"

"That is sufficient," broke in the visitor. "It is not necessary for me to explain that two of my colleagues do not agree with me in my suspicions, I might almost say my conclusions—but needless to remark that does not influence my own judgment, which, as you may surmise, is not formed upon

superficial observations nor shaken easily after it once has been formed."

As Dan did not speak, the teacher continued: "After my usual manner, I shall come directly to the point. This is one of the most valuable of all the many advantages afforded by classical training—lucidity, terseness, directness, simplicity of diction, all those and many more are among the qualities imparted by familiarity with the masterpieces of the greatest writers of all times. I fancy, Richards, that you yourself are acquiring some of these elements in the daily drill of my classroom."

Dan's face was expressionless as he listened. Was the man so innocent and childlike that he simply did not understand how egotistical he was? "His nerve was monumental and his vertebræ were mucilaginous," was Walter's favorite characterization of Scippie—an expression which Dan recalled vividly as he listened to his voluble visitor.

"I trust you have noted the qualities to which I refer?" repeated Mr. Blackman, stroking his chin and looking kindly at Dan as he spoke.

"Really, Mr. Blackman," replied Dan quietly, "I've had to work so hard on my Latin that I haven't had time to think of much else."

"Naturally," assented the teacher cheerfully. "In time, however, you will come to more introspective and analytic ways and then you will be more observant of the lucidity——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Blackman," broke in Dan in a

low voice. "You said you were suspicious of some of the boys. You didn't mean me, did you?"

"Not at all."

"I'm glad of that."

"Your status in the school is too high for that. You need never have any anxiety that you will be under suspicion. We all know you too well to believe that you would yield to——"

"Not for thirty pieces of silver?" broke in Dan.

"I do not quite understand your allusion. However, let me place your mind at rest by assuring you that thus far I have not heard your name referred to even in the remotest connection with this disgraceful and regrettable affair."

"Thank you."

"My own mind has led me in quite another direction."

"Yes, sir; that is what you said."

"Unfortunately, I am somewhat alone in my conclusion."

"Yes, sir," said Dan, now becoming desperate.

"But the analytic training of long-continued classical study has prepared me to be alone at the beginning of many a tangled matter in the discipline of the school. Later I am not so lonely," said the man, a smile of satisfaction spreading over his face at the thought.

"Yes, sir," repeated Dan.

"And now my suspicions are directed against one of your classmates, not only as the instigator but

also perhaps as the original perpetrator or operator. You take me, I fancy?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am convinced that Randall is the guilty party."

With difficulty Dan restrained his impulse to laugh. Randall! Randall, the sedate and serious-minded boy who was troubled to know who he was and equally desirous of gaining everything that serious work in the Tait School could impart. The suggestion would have been ridiculous if it had been made by another teacher, but from the gentle and innocent Mr. Blackman it was so preposterous as to be positively funny. And yet the man's confidence in the value of his own conclusions was so manifest that after a minute or two had elapsed Dan looked at the teacher with some concern.

"It doesn't seem possible that he has had anything to do with it," he said at last.

"At first thought your conclusion seems most fitting, but naturally your judgment is not based upon long experience or upon any well-developed analytic power to trace the psychological processes of an evil-minded youth."

"But Randall is not evil-minded," protested Dan.

"Your declaration once more reflects credit upon your innocence. It is possible that you are not thoroughly familiar with all the facts."

"That is true."

"And my own thorough process of analytic ratiocination——"

"What makes you think he did it?" interrupted Dan.

"Several elements have combined. One of his garments is discolored by paint of exactly the same hue as that which discolors the statue of the founder of the Tait School."

"How do you know?"

"I have eyes—and other methods to assist me. It is unnecessary for me to go into details. It is quite sufficient that what I affirm is correct," said the little teacher so pompously that under other circumstances Dan would have been amused. "Paint on his coat sleeve, and discoloration on his right hand, and an old and worn paint-brush found directly beneath his window—all these are elements in the problem as suggestive as they are incriminating."

"Who found the paint-brush?"

"That brush is now in my possession," declared the pompous little visitor proudly. "Nor is that all that——"

"Did you find it?" again asked Dan.

"It is in my possession and that is sufficient. He also has extreme difficulty in describing his actions at the time that the vile deed was done."

"Have you asked him where he was?"

"Ahem! I have been compelled to be quite circumspect in my method of procedure. Few of my colleagues agreed with me in the premises, and yet my own analytic powers——"

"Did you ask him?" interrupted Dan.

"Not precisely."

"Did you say anything to him about the painting?"

"Most assuredly I did. Every boy in school has been questioned."

"What did you say?" Dan was amazed at his own temerity in asking questions that were so brutally direct. But the mental attitude of his visitor was maddening. He was already enlisted in behalf of his accused classmate.

"I casually inquired what had made the stains on his hand and sleeve."

"Did he explain?"

"He endeavored to, but his guilt was instantly manifest. The benefit of classical training to the perceptive faculties is——"

"How did he explain?"

"Why, if I recall aright, he affirmed that the paint was due to the fact that he had been pushed or had fallen against the statue while the paint was fresh."

"Didn't you believe him?"

"I was inclined at first to accept his explanation, which was quite plausible—but later developments showed——"

"What were they?"

"Why, when I (still speaking in my most casual manner) ventured indirectly to suggest that I was inclined to write to each of the fathers of three boys whom I suspected of——"

"What did he say when you told him that?" in-

quired Dan, showing more interest than he had displayed before.

"Ah! Then it was that my suspicion was confirmed. His manner changed instantly. Indeed, there was the manifestation of anxiety that was well-nigh overwhelming. Richards, I seldom have found the boy who does not betray himself when I threaten to write home and inform his father."

Dan's impulse was to laugh, but restraining himself he said simply, "Yes, sir. I don't believe many boys would want you to do that."

"Most assuredly not. As I said, the plan seldom fails. In the case of Randall I instantly was convinced."

"Did he say anything?"

"There was nothing to be said."

"Well, Mr. Blackman, I don't see that there is anything for me to do in the matter," suggested Dan.

"Indeed, you are mistaken. It is for the very purpose of securing your aid that I have come to your room," said the teacher, as, in his eagerness, he arose and approached the chair in which Dan was seated.

CHAPTER XVI

AN IMPLIED BARGAIN

"WHAT I desire most of all is a confession from Randall——"

"But," interposed Dan hastily.

"Pardon me," interrupted Mr. Blackman. "Pray let me proceed without being broken in upon. As I remarked, what I desire most of all is that Randall shall confess. This would confirm me in the position I have taken and doubtless would secure greater leniency for him, which otherwise would be difficult to obtain. And there is not a possibility of questioning his guilt."

"What do you want me to do?" demanded Dan bluntly.

"I fancy your influence over Randall is quite considerable; at least, I understand that the boys look up to you with a feeling of respect which is shared only to a very limited extent and by a very few. Now, my young friend——"

"What do you want me to do?" again Dan broke in, somewhat divided between a feeling of indignation and a desire to laugh.

"Listen! Now if you were to have a personal interview with Randall, and without boldly declar-

ing the source of your information, you yet should intimate that a direct confession by him would secure all the intercession in my power—and you of course are aware of the influence I have acquired among the boys as well as among the teachers. It will not be necessary for him to proclaim from the housetops, to speak figuratively, the guilt under which he labors, and with which he is charged—not openly—but by one of the teachers whose knowledge and understanding of human nature have been most acutely developed—with having been the instigator, the perpetrator, or at the very least an active accessory in the defilement of the marble statue of the founder of the Tait School. It is useless for him to attempt to evade or escape the issue which has been raised."

"You will hold him guilty unless he can show that he is innocent."

"Precisely. Your phraseology is most apt."

"Mr. Blackman," protested Dan, "I am sure he didn't do it."

"But he did do it!"

"You suspect him, that's all."

"Kindly suggest or imply," said the teacher, ignoring the statement of Dan, "that if he refuses so to do, he may come to me for counsel. I will willingly exert myself in his behalf, provided he will come to me first and acknowledge his guilt. Otherwise I shall simply wash my hands of the entire affair and permit it to take its course, regardless of how

severe the consequences may be to him in case it is deemed well to write to his father."

"Have you ever met his father?"

"I fancy I have. Indeed I have a faint recollection of seeing him in the principal's office some time ago."

"Mr. Blackman, if Al Randall believed that you knew his father or could find him, he would be willing to paint not only the old statue of John Tait, but he'd paint anybody dead or alive."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Just what I say."

"Explain yourself. You have insulted me."

"I had no intention of being disrespectful."

"But you were, sir. You questioned my carefully thought out conclusion. I am convinced that Randall is the guilty party. Is that sufficient?"

"It probably is—for you."

"Is it not sufficient for you?" asked Mr. Blackman, his thin cheeks flushing slightly as he spoke.

"No, sir."

"May I inquire why?"

"Because I know Randall, and it isn't in him to do a thing like that."

"That is a feminine reply. It is not based upon any careful analysis. Still," added the teacher more mildly, "it is not to be expected that you should feel at once as I do, and all I ask of you is to have a confidential talk with him and urge him to come to me with his confession."

"I am willing to talk to him if you want me to."

"Most assuredly I do."

"Then I'll do it."

"Very good. Then I shall hear from you speedily?"

"I'll report to you as soon as I am able."

"I bid you good evening, Richards! By the way," Mr. Blackman added, "if I can be of any assistance to you at any time, do not fail to inform me."

"Thank you," replied Dan quickly. "I can tell you right now what you can do that will help me very much."

"What is that?"

"Some of the boys are taking extra lessons, aren't they?"

"Let me see. Yes, there are two boys in the class in Cicero who are reading up the Cæsar they did not have when they entered."

"Do you think I know enough to tutor them?"

"I am sure you do."

"Would you be willing to send them to me?"

"Gladly! Gladly! But may I inquire why you wish to do this?"

"I must earn some money or leave school."

"Ah, that is a pity. I am glad you have told me of this. I shall bear it in mind and do all that is in my power to assist you. Have you had financial reverses in your home?"

"No, sir."

"What, then, is the cause of your desire to earn money?"

"I can't explain it to you, but it is necessary. As I said, I must do that or go to some other less expensive school."

"Very well. You do as I suggest in the matter of Randall and I shall be very glad to do my part in providing you with tutoring. Again I bid you good evening."

As Mr. Blackman departed, Dan watched him as long as he could be seen. He was puzzled by what the man had said to him, although whether to laugh at the pomposity of the puffed-up teacher or to believe what he had said was still a question. That Mr. Blackman was convinced of Al Randall's guilt there was no doubt, and the fact of the paint having been found on the boy's hands and coat lent some color to his suspicion.

But Dan was not yet ready to accept any such conclusion. Doubtless, Al would easily explain to him what he had held back from the teacher, for the new boy was exceedingly reserved. Indeed, even Dan had found Al at times so quiet and even glum that he wondered how he kept the few friends he had made since he entered the Tait School.

At other times the new boy was as hilarious as any of his classmates and entered with all heart and lungs into their sports or pranks. Dan thought he understood his classmate as few others did. The sight of the care-free boys about him, their frequent

letters from home, their talk of their plans for vacation—all seemed to "get on Al's nerves," as Dan expressed it, and he was not surprised at the depression of his friend. Al did not know who he was.

That wreck on the railroad years ago from which he had escaped, but which had deprived him of any knowledge of who his father and mother were and had left him without a name, doubtless had left other marks as well. Had he any brothers and sisters? Were any of his family now living? Were there possessions which were his by right of birth?

Dan thought he understood how pressing at times such questions were for the troubled Al, who was morbidly sensitive and somewhat inclined to solitude, though whether the tendency was due to his temperament or to his experiences no one knew. Perhaps the boy himself did not understand.

At all events Dan smiled as he walked slowly toward his room thinking over the childish assertions of his teacher. A "disciplined intellect! A mind trained to great insight and to analytic powers!" Dan laughed aloud as he recalled the childish boasting of Mr. Blackman. He wondered if the man ever had been a boy. Certainly he had only a slight understanding of boy nature and less of boy life.

He wanted to tell Walter of his interview, but his promise of secrecy must be kept. But Dan assured himself that in his interview with Al Randall he would not be under any such restriction. If by any chance Al should be in one of his gay moods, he

would meet the questions of his classmate in a manner that Dan was positive he never could forget. And Dan was eager to see him.

As Dan thought longer of the coming interview he was on the point of going at once to Al's room, but just as he took his cap to depart Walter entered the room.

"Where are you going?" demanded his roommate.

"Nowhere in particular," replied Dan.

"Sit down then, I want to talk to you."

"Go ahead," laughed Dan as he seated himself obediently.

"Doctor Stevens is on the war-path," declared Walter excitedly.

"What has made the principal do that? Has the black paint on John Tait made Doctor Stevens use red?"

"Don't be funny, Dan," said Walter irritably. "You can't, even if you try."

"I sha'n't try," said Dan good-naturedly. "What makes you so excited over Doctor Stevens' starting on the war-path?"

"He's after the wrong fellow, that's all."

"Who does he say the guilty man is?"

"Al Randall."

"What!" exclaimed Dan, instantly facing his roommate. "Does he think Al is the artist that decorated marble John Tait?"

"That's right."

"How do you know?"

"Monk told me."

"Monk Staples?"

"The very one." Staples' true and full name was Leonard Ives Staples, or at least that was its form in the catalogue. The boys, however, from some fancied resemblance to a simian, had renamed him "Monkey" Staples, and this in turn had been curtailed to "Monk."

"How does he know?"

"He's been up before the principal. Doctor Stevens sent for him."

"And he told Monk that he suspected Al Randall? That's a likely story."

"That's what Monk told me himself," asserted Walter.

"Do you believe it?"

"I don't know anything about it—that is, any more than what Monk told me."

"What did he tell you?"

"He said Doctor Stevens thought Al did it."

"Did he tell Monk that?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Just as Monk was going into the doctor's study, Scippie, it seems, was coming out and Monk heard him say that Al Randall did the 'desecrating.'"

"What was Monk there for?"

"Sent for. Doctor Stevens wanted to be informed what Monk knew about it."

"Did he suspect him?"

"I guess so."

"That would be more likely than to suspect Al."

"You can't always tell about such things. Al is a queer stick."

"But he isn't a crooked stick."

"You don't think he is, you mean."

"Do you believe he did that trick? Why should he? What motive could he have?"

"I don't know—at least I'm not sure."

"What do you think?"

"He goes down into the dumps sometimes, and when he does he's 'agin' you and me and the whole outfit here."

"That's all true enough, but it doesn't explain this thing. Why should he want to make old John Tait suffer for our letting the academy eleven beat us?"

"Maybe Al is sore."

"About what?"

"Oh, the school in general, maybe, and some things in particular."

"For instance?"

"Against me for not playing better football."

"And me too?"

"Perhaps, he——"

"Go on," said Dan as his roommate hesitated.

"He said you didn't try to win. He said a wooden Indian in front of a cigar-store was lively compared with your work against the academy

eleven. He declared that you ran as if you had a heavy weight tied to you."

"Maybe I did," assented Dan.

"And maybe you didn't. I haven't said that I thought you covered yourself with glory in that game, but you're no funk. I guess your pitching record made everybody expect you to do as well on the gridiron as you did in the box. Where are you going?" inquired Walter quickly as Dan seized his cap and started abruptly from the room.

"I'm going over to have a heart-to-heart talk with Al Randall," called Dan as he started down the stairway.

CHAPTER XVII

THE INTERVIEW WITH RANDALL

WHEN Dan Richards rapped on the door of Al Randall's room, he was uncertain how he best could introduce the purpose of his coming. Now that he actually was about to fulfil his promise he had given Mr. Blackman, he was seized with a fear, even a shrinking from his task. The report which Walter had brought had been most confusing. But the promise Dan had given his teacher was not to be evaded. He rapped loudly, if not boldly, upon the door.

"Come in. What are you standing out there in the cold for?" called a voice from within.

Dan opened the door and entered the room.

"Sit down," said Al, cordially greeting his caller. "I'm glad to see you. I've got the blues."

"That's a queer disease," responded Dan with a smile.

"Oh, that's a way of talking that makes me suffer," snapped Al irritably, his mood apparently instantly changing.

"You think you're the only one to have any troubles, I suppose?"

"I've got all I want."

"What is the big trouble now?"

"You don't know anything about it, Dan. You know who you are, and when you want to you go home, and——"

"Hold on," broke in Dan. "That's hard; but, after all, it's one of the things you can't change."

"That doesn't make it any easier."

"I think it does," said Dan thoughtfully.

"How does it?"

"Why, there isn't any use in taking on about things that can't be helped, is there?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I know. There isn't any use in making a fuss over what can't be changed, and then there isn't any use in fuming over what you can change, see?"

"No."

"Well, suppose I lay awake nights thinking and worrying about the fact that my eyes are blue instead of black. It wouldn't help to change the color of them, would it?"

"No."

"Well, then suppose I got to worrying about my low grade in algebra. That wouldn't help any either, would it?"

"It might."

"No, sir; if I'm low in algebra the thing for me to do is to quit worrying and go to work."

"That's all right——"

"Of course it's all right! So——"

"Hold on! Suppose you didn't know who you were? You see the other fellows with their fathers and mothers and you don't even so much as know who your father was or what he was, whether he was straight or had been in jail. If you had to face all that——"

"My father is dead," suggested Dan gently, "and so is Walter's."

"That's different."

"How is it different?"

"At least you know who he was."

"Yes. But when I see the fellows with their fathers and then I think how I have to fight my way alone—oh, I tell you there isn't any use in it at all. You want to brace up."

"I do sometimes, and then again I just feel as if I didn't care a rap what I did or where I went. What's the use anyway?"

"That's the baby act."

"I don't care what you call it," retorted Al, his face reddening as he spoke.

"But it is."

"All right. Call it what you want to. What did you come over to see me about? Was it that?"

"No, Al," replied Dan, whose turn it was now to feel somewhat uncomfortable.

"Well, what was it then?"

"I dropped in——" began Dan, striving to speak lightly.

"For what?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Al, do you know who painted the statue?"

For a moment the boy's expression of surprise was more manifest than any other feeling. He was looking at Dan without turning away his face. A tinge of color flamed over his cheeks and, at last when he spoke, he said, "What do you come to me with that for?"

"Never mind that part. Do you know?"

"Suppose I do, and then again suppose I don't? What of it?"

"A good deal of it."

"Do you know who did it?" said Al evasively.

"I have been told."

"Who did it?"

"Don't you know?"

"Yes, I know."

"Why didn't you say so before?" asked Dan quietly.

"I didn't choose to."

"All right. It isn't anything to me——"

"I should say it wasn't!"

"Except that I wanted to help the fellow."

"How can you help him?"

"I sha'n't tell you that unless you are the one that did the painting."

"Do you believe I did it?"

"Not if you say you didn't."

"Suppose I don't say anything about it? Still think I did it?"

"Look here, Al; I didn't come over here to prod you. I'll tell you straight just why I'm here." Dan stopped a moment as he became aware that his classmate was so intently regarding him that his look was almost painful. Hesitating a moment, Dan then continued: "It came to me that you were the one who did it. I wouldn't believe it, but I finally agreed to——"

"Come and invite the prodigal to have some stuffed veal?" sneered Al.

"Not at all. I was so certain that you didn't have anything to do with the scrape that before I understood just what I was doing I agreed to put it up to you——"

"Who is the one you promised?" interrupted Al.

"It doesn't matter."

"But it does matter. It makes all the difference in the world."

"How?"

"I'll tell you—was it one of the boys or one of the teachers?"

"It wasn't one of the boys."

"Why don't you come right out like a little man?" exclaimed Al. "If you had said in the first place that you had promised to be a telltale, that you would find out in some sneaking way and then run back like a good little boy and tell your tale——"

"You know better than that," interrupted Dan, his face in turn now flushing darkly. "I'm not that kind."

"But you said just now you were," retorted Al. "Answer me! Didn't you say just a minute ago that you came here to find out just because you promised one of the teachers you would?"

"You don't put that straight," protested Dan.

"Answer my question!"

"It isn't a fair question."

"You're afraid to answer it!"

"All right. Call it what you want to. Will you answer my question?"

"I have answered it."

"How?"

"You asked me if I knew who painted the old stone statue and I told you I did know. Anything else you'd like to find out before you toot back like a good little boy and tell the teacher? Bah!"

"That isn't it! You don't understand."

"The whole trouble is that I do understand. That's just it! I know a sly, sneaking telltale the minute I set eyes on him! And you are it."

Dan's anger, slow to rise, was beginning to burn. To have his motives in coming not only misunderstood, but also directly charged with being false was more than he could endure quietly. For a moment he glared at his classmate and then without a word started toward the door.

"Hold on there! Where are you going?" demanded Al sharply.

"I'm going to leave," replied Dan tartly.

"Don't go yet."



" Dan's anger, slow to rise, was beginning to burn "

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"I can't and won't stay here and listen to such unfair——"

"Maybe I was a little too quick," broke in Al.

"You were."

"Well, you wouldn't like it any better than I do to have a fellow come to your room and ask you if you put the mourning bands on old John Tait and then own up that he was a go-between for one of the teachers. Now would you?"

"That isn't what I said."

"That's what you meant."

"No, sir; I——"

"Sit down. I want to say something else."

"Say it," said Dan tersely, without offering to take his seat.

"Do you know Watson?"

"Of course I know him," replied Dan, his cheeks flaming. "Why? What of it?"

"Nothing much."

"You knew I know him."

"Of course I did. What kind of a writer is he? Would he stand any show for a prize if he should hand in an essay in the prize contest?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"Is that so?" laughed Al Randall derisively. "Well, I can't say that I have ever read very many of the literary productions of Watson either. He's a good center for the eleven, anyway."

"Why did you ask me that question?" inquired Dan.

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps for the same reason you came to me with your question from Mr. Tuttle, or maybe it was from little 'Scippie.' Which was it, Dan?" laughed Al tauntily.

"I'll answer your question when you answer mine."

"I did answer yours."

"How?"

"You asked me if I knew who painted the statue black. I told you that I did know. Now you answer my question."

"You know I can't tell you."

"I know you haven't told me. Dan, what do you think? Would the doctor or Scippie be interested to hear how that literary effusion of Watson was produced? He has handed in his essay, you say."

"I didn't say anything about it."

"Oh, yes you did."

"I didn't say a word," protested Dan.

"No. Your reply was not vocal. Actions sometimes speak louder than words. You have heard that before, haven't you?"

"There's no use in my staying here any longer."

"Not unless you do your part."

"I tried to do——"

"Just a minute, Dan; just a little minute," broke in Al with a sneer. "I want to ask you one more question."

"Go ahead."

"Which do you think would interest Scippie more,

to find out who painted John Tait black or where the budding literary genius of Watson has——"

"Has what?" asked Dan as his roommate stopped.

"Has been found, after having been hidden so long."

"My mother used to tell me to count a hundred before I spoke when I was mad through and through."

"Why don't you try it?"

"I've counted seventy-five, and here goes; if I waited another minute I'd——"

"You'd what?" sneered Al.

Dan did not reply as he bolted for the door. Once outside the room his feeling of anger was modified by his mortification. How did Al know about the prize essay? Had Watson told him? It did not seem possible to Dan that his classmate could have been so silly as that. And yet Al knew—although Dan was almost at as great a loss to understand how much Al knew as where he obtained his knowledge.

Almost unmindful of his promise to Mr. Blackman, Dan suddenly said to himself, "I'll do it. I'll go straight to Watson's room and have it out with him."

Anger, mortification, even fear were among the boy's feelings as he hastened across the school campus toward the dormitory in which Watson roomed.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FALSE CHARGE

UNFORTUNATELY Dan found that Watson was not in his room. The troubled boy turned away, and as he came out into the path across the campus his roommate joined him.

"What's the trouble, old man?" said Walter lightly.

"What makes you think there is any trouble?"

"I can always tell," laughed Walter. "You run up your signal of distress so high that every one knows it when you're in the dumps."

"I didn't know I showed it——" began Dan somewhat testily.

"Of course you didn't," broke in his friend; "and not one fellow in a thousand would know it, either. You burn your own smoke all right; but when one fellow knows another as I know you, it doesn't take him long to understand when the fat is in the fire. Now, what is it?"

"Nothing much."

"That depends on what you mean by 'much.' You've had something on your mind for a good while. Now own up, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"What is it? Money matters?"

"That is a part."

"Well, don't you worry any more about that. I've got it all fixed."

"You've got what fixed?"

"Now don't you climb up on your high-horse! I've got it fixed, and that is enough, isn't it? I'm telling you it's all right."

"I don't understand."

"You don't need to understand. Isn't it all right when I tell you that your term-bill for the second half is arranged for? Can't you take my word for it?"

"Who paid it?" asked Dan slowly.

"I didn't say."

"But you said it was paid."

"And I told you the truth—at least it's as good as paid. I can get a receipt from the school treasurer if you won't take my word."

"You'll have to explain yourself."

"Why will I 'have' to?" demanded Walter lightly.

"You know."

"No, I don't 'know.' Now talk about something else. Let's talk about the weather, if that suits you better."

"Who is to pay my term-bill?" again Dan asked.

"It's a secret."

"Walter, I can't take a thing like that, and you know it," said Dan in a low voice.

"I guess you'll have to 'take' it, whether you 'can' or can't."

Dan smiled, and did not at the moment reply.

"What'll you do when you find out that the bill is paid? You can't back out then."

"I sha'n't have to 'back out' if I don't go in."

"Now see here, Dan," said Walter at last when the two boys were seated in their room, "don't be foolish. All money is for, anyway, is to use. I don't hesitate a minute to let my grandfather have the high honor and the great privilege of paying my bill for the last half. And I guess I've got as good a reason as anybody for feeling down about money. Come now!"

"It's different."

"What is different, I'd like to know? I haven't any money and you haven't any. We're alike that far, anyway. Somebody offers to pay my bill and somebody offers to pay yours. Once more, and yet again we're alike. The only difference I can see is that I take things as they come and you don't."

"Well, is your grandfather paying for me?"

"I sha'n't tell you."

"Is he?"

"No, he isn't. I'll tell you that much and not a word more."

"You're not doing it?"

"Me? You mean me? Why, Dan, I couldn't pay for the ink to write a receipt with," laughed Walter. "No, you can cut me off the list; that is sure."

"Who is doing it then?"

"I sha'n't tell you. The bill will be paid and that's enough for you to know."

"Walter, I must know more about it. I can't take it unless I do. Whoever is doing it—and you say you're not the one—is mighty good, but I——"

"Now hold right on," broke in Walter, "that bill will be paid. If you're fool enough not to take what is paid for, why, I've nothing more to say. It's for you, you understand; and if you leave it no other fellow will ever have it."

"Why did the one who paid it do it?"

"Ask him, or her, or them, or——"

"Is it more than one?"

"I think it may be a million."

"But suppose it shouldn't be done, even if I agreed to it? Suppose I stay here and then this person, or 'they,' conclude not to do it, what then?"

"I'll get a receipted bill for you this week if you want it."

"You're——"

"No, I'm not," interrupted Walter as he saw that his roommate's eyes were full and that he was hardly able to speak. "You're the whitest fellow in the school, Dan. Doctor Stevens could afford to let you stay and not let you pay a cent, and he'd still make money just by your being one of the fellows."

"You don't know what you're talking about," said Dan, shaking his head.

"Don't I? You just watch me and see whether I do or not."

"Walter," said Dan soberly, "what would you think of a fellow who hired some one to do his work for him?"

"I'd think he was lucky," laughed Walter. "Don't look at me, I'm not doing it."

"But suppose he passed the work off as if it was his?"

"It is his if he bought and paid for it, isn't it?" laughed Walter lightly.

"That's what he says."

"And I guess it's true. Why?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to know what you thought, that's all."

"Sure?" demanded Walter, looking keenly at his roommate. "Do you know I more than half believe you——"

"Believe what?" asked Dan as Walter hesitated.

"Oh, nothing. But it would be like you to go to making a mole-hill into a mountain and then climb up on the top and sit there moping."

"Fine!" exclaimed Dan in mocking admiration. "You're getting quite eloquent. Who painted the statue of John Tait black?" he suddenly added.

"I've heard, but I don't 'know.'"

"Did you hear that some one did it, or was it more than one?"

"One."

"Al Randall?"

"That's what I heard, but I think Al was about as likely to do that job as you would be to stick pins in Doctor Stevens. What's the matter?" Walter added suddenly. "You haven't any idea that he did it, have you?"

"No, I can't think——" Dan spoke hesitatingly, and his roommate was quick to note his uncertainty.

"That's fine!" laughed Walter. "Pretty quick you'll be suspecting Scippie of using a pony in Cæsar. What did Al have to say?"

"Not very much."

"He owned up that he knew who did it?"

"Yes."

"Did he enjoy what you said to him?"

"No."

"I don't see how he could. Now look here, Dan Richards! You know I'm a good friend——"

"I do."

"Well, let me tell you as a friend of yours that you have made the biggest mistake of your life."

"I have done that so often that I'm pretty well seasoned by this time," replied Dan, smiling slightly as he spoke.

"Oh, this is no joke! I'm telling you that if Al is much stirred up—— Was he?" Walter added eagerly.

"His voice, what he said, and a few other things made me think he was—somewhat," answered Dan dryly.

"I thought he'd be. And, Dan, I don't blame

him. Just put yourself in his place and think how you would like it if Ned Davis, or some other fellow came to you to find out something or other—it may have been Scippie for all I know—whether you were the one to start up something in the school. Why, I'm telling you that you'd say things right out in meeting! Now wouldn't you, Dan?"

"Very likely."

"Well, you can't blame Al for getting mad then when you do that very thing to him."

"I'm not blaming him."

"But you're putting yourself in a hole. There isn't a fellow in the Tait School that would stand by you, Dan."

"That's probably true," acknowledged Dan.

"Then what made you do it?"

"I couldn't very well help myself."

"Bah! That's no excuse! I wouldn't plead the baby act."

"I'm not pleading it," said Dan, the color slowly creeping into his cheeks.

"Yes, you are pleading it!" said Walter more loudly. "You own up that some one—probably one of the teachers—sent you to ask Al if he painted the statue. Al gets mad when you fire the question at him, just as anybody would. I never would have believed you'd be guilty of such a low-down trick."

"You believe it now?"

"I have to believe it. You yourself say that's just what you did."

As Dan looked straight into his roommate's eyes and did not reply, Walter continued, becoming still more angry as he spoke: "And after what has just been done for you, Dan! It's too bad! There isn't a fellow in the Tait School that will stand up for a telltale."

"I'm not a telltale."

"No, you're worse than a telltale ever thought of being! You trot around as a spy. Of all the sneaking tricks, that is certainly the worst. And right after what I've just told you had been fixed up for you. That is the worst of all."

Walter was deeply enraged, and as he faced his roommate his feelings were expressed in the look of contempt that was visible even in the glare in his eyes. "I'm going straight over to Al's room and hear his side of the story," abruptly declared Walter; and snatching his cap he started quickly toward the door.

CHAPTER XIX

DAN'S DECISION

LEFT to himself, Dan somewhat disconsolately seated himself by the window. It seemed to the troubled boy that all things had been conspiring against him. The question with which he had gone to Al Randall had not been one of his own seeking. Indeed, he had rebelled against the commission which Mr. Blackman had given him. But what else could he do under the circumstances, Dan asked himself almost angrily. It was not of his own choice that he had asked the question of his classmate. And he had done his utmost to show Al that he was not actuated by any desire of his own. In what a different spirit Al Randall had received his visit from that in which he had come! Dan himself was angry as he recalled the way in which he had been received. He had no right to impute the motives at which Al sneeringly had pointed as the cause of his call and his questions.

And Walter too! For a moment Dan forgot the impulsiveness of his roommate and how quickly he jumped to conclusions—sometimes to change them again as quickly as he had arrived at them. He was hurt because Walter had thought it possible

that he could act as a go-between in such a matter. And to be called a telltale on such a basis! Dan fully understood what such a report scattered among the boys of the school would mean for him. His success as the pitcher of the nine, his work on the eleven—none of these things would aid him in the face of such an accusation. In the eyes of the school he would be a traitor. No Benedict Arnold or Charles Lee ever confronted a conviction more vitally held or more contemptuously expressed than would Dan if the Tait School should receive and believe what Walter in his anger had so glibly charged him with.

Dan arose and, as he walked about the room, strove to convince himself that he would be able to live down the false charge. Walter in his impulsive way would acknowledge that he had been hasty and would apologize as profusely as he had on several previous occasions.

But even if Walter should not change his mind, what then? And Dan strove to strengthen himself by thinking of his record in the school. That would help him even when he was most downcast, Dan endeavored to assure himself; but even while he was thinking of the possibility he recalled suddenly the essay which he had written for Watson, and he was instantly doubly depressed. A fine showing he would make, he thought bitterly. He had the reputation of being "square" in all things. Even "Scippie" had told him he had the respect and

confidence of the boys and their teachers as no other student in school had. And Walter again and again had implied and even said that though his roommate was no "mollycoddle," he still was not troubled by the ordinary temptations of school life. It was true that Walter had merely laughed and spoken lightly as if it were a joke when Dan had presented the suggestion of one fellow doing another's work for him and being paid for what he did, but an imaginary case was not like the reality. Dan well knew that Walter, in spite of his lightness, would be shocked if he knew "old reliable," as he often called his roommate, had really been guilty of the offense he had presented as imaginary.

Doubtless he did know now, for Al Randall would in his anger surely tell him. How Al knew of the arrangement was still a question, though Dan had slight doubt that Watson had explained what Dan had done for him. "He's a great fellow," said Dan disgustedly to himself as he paced about his room. "He has everything to lose and nothing to gain by telling. But then," he added with a smile, "it's just because he doesn't know any better that he does such a fool thing. If he did know enough not to do it, he would know enough to write his own essay and not have to hire some one to do the job for him."

And last of all was what Walter had just now told him of the payment of his school bill for the second half of the year. He wouldn't have done

that, or arranged for it to be done, if he had felt as apparently he did when in his anger he bolted from the room. Could he receive such help? Dan was more and more convinced that he must not take it. And yet having received the help which had come from Walter's father, it would be more difficult now to refuse the latest offer. It was good of Walter, and Dan's face softened as he recalled the many impulsively generous acts of his warm-hearted roommate. But Walter's anger and his unjust as well as untrue accusation made Dan's heart a little bitter, even as he tried to bolster himself by recalling how generous Walter had been.

No; it was not only a hard situation, but also one that was impossible, Dan assured himself. Even at the thought he had a vision of the little farmhouse that was his home. How peaceful and quiet it was there compared with the strife and life of the Tait School. Even now he could see the hill and its tree-covered sides that marked the boundary between the farm of Walter's grandfather and his. There was the brook, and the music of its tumbling waters even now could be heard. The very cattle lying on the shaded banks and contentedly chewing their cuds presented a picture of peace. The fields of corn, the long rows of potatoes, which he himself had planted, the shrubs and flowers in the front yard—and then Dan had a vision of his mother sitting with her work on the side piazza, as she sometimes did. There was one who never misunderstood him. She

was always his friend, looking for and finding what she believed to be in the life of her boy. What was the use in leaving such surroundings? The question suddenly struck Dan with a force it never had had before. Here he was misunderstood, charged with something of which he was innocent, his continued presence in the school depended upon the "charity" of some one, and he did not even know who his unknown benefactor was. Why should he stay? How his gentle mother's face would light up if he should go back and say: "Mother, I've had enough. I'm not going to try to be a big man. I'm just going to stay here with you and Tom. If the farm was good enough for my father, I guess it's good enough for me. I don't like it in the Tait School. The work is hard, the fellows don't understand me, I'm not used to their ways of living, and I'm having a hard time. 'The game isn't worth the candle.' I'm going to give it up and just stay home."

So vivid was the picture and the thought that Dan instantly seized his cap and started for the home of Doctor Stevens. He would tell the principal, while the thought was strongly upon him, that he was going to leave.

In a brief time Dan was admitted to the office, though even as he entered his heart was troubled by misgivings. Was he, after all, playing the part of a coward? Was he running from difficulties just because they were hard? It was too late now to

draw back, for he could hear Doctor Stevens coming down the hall. Summoning all his courage, Dan arose as the man entered the room.

"Good evening, Richards," said the principal kindly, glancing inquiringly as he spoke to his visitor.

"Good evening, doctor," responded Dan. "I've come to tell you that I am intending to leave."

"I'm sorry to hear that. When did you decide?"

"About five minutes ago."

"Ah! Did you receive bad news from home?"

"No, sir."

"What made you decide, then, so suddenly?"

"Two or three things."

"You're not homesick?"

"It isn't that——"

"I shouldn't give much for a boy, or for his home, either, for the matter of that, if he didn't miss it."

"It isn't that," protested Dan. "I think I've made a mistake."

"In what?"

"In coming to the Tait School. You see—of course—you know that my roommate's father—Mr. Borden—paid my way."

"Yes."

"Well, he's dead now, and the family hasn't any money, and I can't take it, and I haven't any of my own."

The principal smiled as the disjointed explanations

were given, and then said, when his visitor hesitated in some confusion, "Go on, Richards. I'm interested in what you are saying."

"That's about all there is to it."

"Are you sure?"

"I think so."

"There hasn't anything else come up within a day or two to influence your decision?"

"No, sir. Yes, sir—that is, sir, nothing of very great importance."

"Yes?" inquired Doctor Stevens smilingly. "Perhaps you would better tell me what it is. I shall then be better prepared to advise—I mean, I shall see a little more clearly perhaps what has led to your decision. I shall be very sorry, Richards, to have you go. I don't need to tell you that."

"Thank you, Doctor Stevens," said Dan in a low voice. "There have been some things that are not very pleasant——"

"I see," assented the principal.

"But if that was all, I shouldn't think of leaving," protested Dan.

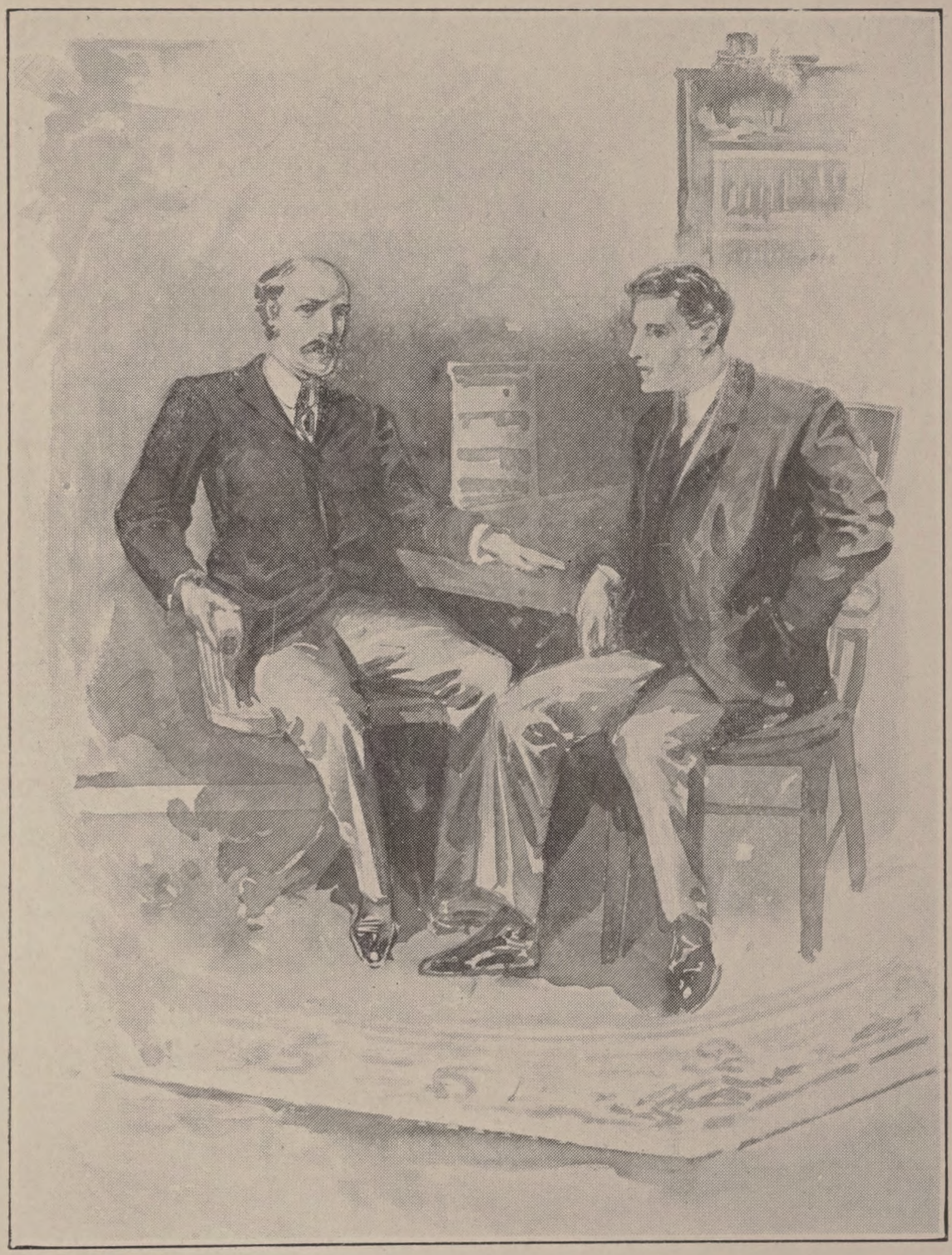
"You like the school?"

"I don't see how there could be a better one."

"And are you doing well in your class work?"

"I think so. At any rate, my teachers seem to think I am."

"And they don't form an opinion like that lightly. Is your trouble with any of the boys of a serious nature?"



" ' I understand,' broke in Doctor Stevens gently"

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How did Doctor Stevens know that the "trouble" was with the boys? Dan was slightly mystified by the question, and he was also slightly confused as he replied, "It may be."

"And your own share in it—what about that?" asked Doctor Stevens.

"I didn't have any share."

"It is all the fault of the other fellow, is it?" inquired the principal quizzically.

"They didn't understand——"

"Ah, yes. It is not uncommon that a fellow is misunderstood. And the worst of it is that the experience is not limited to school life, either. That fellow who charges us with something we did not do or else mistakes or misinterprets what we do do follows us all through our life. I have found that we shall never rid ourselves of him, so there is only one thing left for us to do."

"What is that?" asked Dan in a low voice.

"Why, you just learn how to deal with him."

"But suppose you can't? Suppose what he says isn't true, and yet is near enough to the truth or looks enough like it to make every fellow think it is true? And I can't say a word because——"

"I understand," broke in Doctor Stevens gently; "if you felt free to say a little—just one or two sentences perhaps—the entire matter would be plain. Is that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"I understand."

"There isn't anything else to be done, is there? I am afraid if I stay——"

"You'll be more afraid if you don't stay," interrupted Doctor Stevens.

"I don't see," stammered Dan.

"Let me go back to the first thing of which you spoke—the matter of your term-bill. Now I want you to know that that has been paid—practically."

"Who paid it?"

"I can't tell you."

"But I must know. I can't take so much from people I don't know, or at least I don't know who may have paid it."

"Yes you can, and you must," said Doctor Stevens quietly. "Personally, I never had any hesitancy in letting those who were more fortunate in some ways than I do some things beyond my power. There's a deal of difference between asking and receiving. Now I think you know that I am your friend, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now just because I am your friend, and because I know what you don't know about this matter I am saying to you, don't make any mistake that will radically change, even if it doesn't thwart, your entire life. I can't put this too strongly. You must trust me, for I know."

Dan was silent, and Doctor Stevens, carefully watching the boy before him, continued: "All your other troubles may be serious enough, but I assure

you that they will right themselves and you will be all the stronger for them—stronger not only among the boys, but in yourself as well. What you need is a little patience. One must learn how to labor, but he must also learn how to wait. I think sometimes that waiting is harder than laboring. If you run away just because there are some hard things to face you'll bear the mark of the coward all through your life. If you win out now you'll be just that much stronger."

Still Dan did not speak. He was thinking of a talk he once had with Carlton Hall,[1] and that he had said in his own way something very like that which Doctor Stevens now was saying to him in his kindly manner.

"Of course," added the principal, "I must not overpersuade you. You must settle some things for yourself. That's what you're here for; but if you will take my advice you will not refuse this offer to pay your term-bill. I assure you that I know all about it, and I should not advise you as I do if I did not know that it is best for you to take it—and wait. Then, as to the other matters—I have been here more than fifteen years, and it may comfort you to know that your experience is not new, though it is new to you. I have never failed in finding that the boy who ran from his troubles always regretted his action, which, after all has been said, is always cowardly. But I have never known a boy who

[1] See "The Pennant."

stayed and waited with patience who was sorry that he decided to play the part of a man. That is all I have to say, Richards, and I shall have to ask you to excuse me now, as I have another party waiting to see me. Think over everything that I have said to you and let me know what you decide to do."

CHAPTER XX

THE DESERTION

THE confusion in Dan's mind was greater when he departed from the house of the principal than it had been when he came. He was deeply moved by the advice and the manifest interest of Doctor Stevens. But the solution of his problems was still beyond his powers to see.

Ought he to follow the advice that had been given him? Was it really a cowardly act to leave the Tait School and go back to his home? If Dan had been free to decide for himself, so great was his anger, he very likely would have departed at once, and too without a word of explanation, justifying himself by the assertion that he had neither sought help nor had he brought on his troubles by any act of his own.

When the troubled boy at last returned to his room he did his utmost to busy himself in the preparation of his work for the morrow; but try as he would, the effort was only partly successful, and when at last he sought his bed his roommate had not returned.

Some time had elapsed, and Dan had been unable to sleep when he heard Walter enter the room.

There was a hope in his heart that Walter would speak to him and explain that the troubles all had been imaginary. But though Dan heard his roommate moving about for a half-hour, not a word was spoken and at last the lights were turned out and Walter too sought his bed.

Restless and deeply hurt by the false charges that had been made against him, as well as perplexed by the advice of Doctor Stevens, Dan did not obtain very much sleep, and when he awoke in the morning he discovered that Walter already had dressed and departed. There was something forbidding in such action, for Walter's first noisy announcement that he was about to enter into the new day was a shout for Dan to "get up," though, as a matter of fact, Dan usually was dressed long before his roommate opened his eyes.

Now Walter was gone, and when Dan glanced at the clock and saw that the breakfast hour was perilously near, he hastily donned his clothing. His heart was heavy. He was eager for Walter to explain that he had been unduly hasty in his conclusions, and that Al Randall also had now come to his senses. All this was so natural and plain that Dan felt that if he could only hear the cordial words of his friends he could easily forget or ignore all other troubles.

At the breakfast-table he sat silent, though he was keenly observant of all that was being said or done by his classmates. He had an impression that both

Al and Walter were unusually talkative, though no part of their conversation was directed to him. But it was not unusual for Dan to have but little to say, for he was seldom a talker.

Convinced that his friends intentionally were avoiding him, Dan pretended not to notice the slight and walked alone across the campus to his room. When he entered he was surprised to find both Al and Walter there, though he still strove to hide his real feelings. He silently turned to his desk, waiting for either of the boys to speak.

"Look here, Dan Richards!" said Walter sharply. "We'd like to know just how this thing stands. We want to know what you intend to do."

"About what?" inquired Dan in a low voice, looking up at his classmates as he spoke.

"Don't try any bluff. You know what we mean."

"You'll have to explain."

"Well, then, do you intend to tell?"

"I haven't anything to tell that the school, and teachers too, don't know already."

"That isn't answering my question."

"I think it is. I can't tell what I don't know."

"Do you intend to tell what you do know?"

"You'll have to explain what you mean by that."

"Al says you came to find out if he'd painted the statue."

"Well?"

"You don't deny it?"

"I'm not saying anything."

"But you told Al, or you implied——"

"I told Al—and he is here and can tell you whether what I am saying is true or not—that some one—I didn't mention any names—had said that he was the one who had painted the statue. I didn't believe it, and when I said I felt so sure that he didn't that I wasn't afraid to put the question right up to him——"

"That's one of the prettiest fairy-tales I ever heard," interrupted Al in a loud voice.

There was fire in Dan's eyes as he looked at the boy, but he did not speak.

"Are you going to carry the news to the teachers?" demanded Walter once more.

"What news?"

"Oh, quit your foolishness! You know what I mean."

"I'm not going to volunteer——"

"That hasn't anything to do with this matter."

"I suspect some of the teachers know."

"And used you to find out a little more?" sneered Walter.

"I guess everybody in school knows as much as I do."

"What do you know?"

"Only what you and Al said."

"What was that?"

"That Al Randall knew who put the paint on."

"Anything more?"

"That's all I heard either you or Al say."

"Did anybody else tell you anything?"

"No. I think not, unless somebody may have said just what you did."

"That Al knew?"

"Yes."

"The teachers are trying to make him tell."

"Are they?"

"Yes, they are. Now, Dan, don't you go and blab——"

"I'm not in the habit of doing that," broke in Dan quietly, though his eyes were blazing.

"Well, give us your word that you won't speak to a single teacher——"

"You don't want my word. Besides, I can't give it."

"Why can't you?" demanded Walter in a lower tone.

It was plain that the impulsive Walter now was eager to find some way out of the difficulty. If his roommate would only be reasonable, was his unspoken plea, then all the threatening trouble would be avoided. And Dan, understanding what was in the mind of his friend, was equally eager to find a solution.

"I can shut off everything, except——" began Dan.

"No 'buts' or 'ands' or 'ifs' or 'except,'" broke in Al Randall. "What we want is a straight promise from you that you won't say a word to anybody."

"I sha'n't make any such promise," said Dan quietly, looking straight into the eyes of his classmate as he spoke.

"Ah!" sneered Al, "I knew there was a colored gentleman hiding somewhere in the woodpile. It's just as I told you, Walter. This fellow, who has posed as a saint, is just a pious fraud."

For a moment Walter thought Dan was about to lose control of himself. He was so angry that the muscles in his hands and arms twitched. He even advanced a step toward Al, but turning abruptly about he seated himself and in a low voice said: "There isn't any use in talking any more. If you can't trust me now, you won't if I give my word."

"I guess that's all right," said Al bitingly. "A fellow who is a go-between for the teachers isn't a chap whose word is worth much anywhere. Do you know what I think?" he added brutally, looking Dan full in the face as he spoke.

Dan picked up a book instead of answering the question, as if the entire matter now was one of indifference to him. His pale cheeks and the brightness of his eyes, however, belied his attempt to appear calm.

"Do you know what I think?" repeated Al in still louder tones.

"If you are referring to me," said Dan indifferently, "I'm not deaf. No, I don't know what you think. I hadn't thought that you were doing much thinking, if I thought of you at all."

"You're a pious fraud!" shouted Al. "You—posing before the little chaps as a paragon! You, patting yourself on the shoulder because you are such a good little boy and all the time trying to peddle out your wares to anybody that will buy! You'd sell yourself for money and not very much either, though it would be more than you're worth! You played ball for money last summer, and then come back to school and say you are straight. Bah! And now to run to the teachers. How much do you get for that? Come, now," added Al. "I don't believe you do it for nothing. Don't you get paid for it?"

"Not a cent," said Dan, in the low tones which Walter knew were a sign of his deepest anger.

"Not even a little penny?" laughed Al derisively. "Not a thing? Not a promise of any kind?"

Dan suddenly thought of what Mr. Blackman had said to him and his promise, implied if not spoken, that if Dan would get some word from Al concerning the painting of the statue of John Tait, then he (Mr. Blackman) would try to secure some tutoring for Dan. The boy's face became even paler as the remembrance came to him; and though neither of the other boys in the room had a glimpse of its cause, the change in Dan was so manifest that both were instantly aware of it.

"Say it! Say it!" laughed Al in derision.

"Say what?"

"Say you didn't have anything said to you—that is, there wasn't any condition or promise or any such thing if you'd come to spy on me and report what you found."

"You know I didn't intend to spy on you or any one else."

"Just say it then," persisted Al. "That's all you have to do."

"You can do that, can't you, Dan?" joined in Walter.

"I'll say nothing. Whatever I do will be wrong," said Dan abruptly.

"It won't if it's right."

"There won't be anything right that I can say."

"You mean you can't say anything right."

"You can deny what he accuses you of," said Walter eagerly.

"If you'll leave me——"

"Ah! A-a-a-h! 'Murder will out,'" sneered Al.

"I sha'n't say another word," declared Dan. "You won't take what I say; or if you do take it, you try to twist it so it sounds all wrong."

"Look here, Dan," pleaded Walter, "this is a good deal more serious than you seem to realize. You can tell us 'yes' or 'no,' can't you?"

"No, I can't."

"Why not?"

"I told you before."

"And you won't say you won't go to any of the teachers?"

"I can't say that——"

"Then I don't want anything more to do with you, Dan Richards!" shouted Walter. "I never would have believed that you would stoop as low as that. You'd better go back to Rodman, where such cads seem to grow. This isn't any place for them."

"That's right. Pitcher or no pitcher, professional or not, you haven't any right here," chimed in Al Randall.

Dan gazed at the two boys, his own heart filled with anger and prompting him to deal with each of them as he believed he deserved.

"I'm done with you, Dan Richards!" said Walter. "I can stand every kind of a fellow better than I can a sneak——"

"And a fellow who will spy on other fellows for money," joined in Al Randall.

"Ah! you seem to be having a very animated discussion. I was out for my morning stroll and just dropped in for a moment."

Dan was aghast as he recognized the voice of Mr. Blackman. Of all places and times in which to appear, the present was the worst.

"Did you come to see Richards or me?" inquired Al Randall blandly.

"More particularly to see Richards, though I am quite confident that—that——"

Before the teacher's sentence was completed Al, with a deep sneer on his face as he looked at Dan, turned and made for the door.

CHAPTER XXI

IN A FALSE POSITION

I'M going too," declared Walter tartly, as he looked angrily at his roommate.

It was almost on Dan's tongue to urge Walter to remain, but his pride prevented. If his friend did not care sufficiently to stay and learn the exact truth, as he would from the interview, then he would not urge him to do what his own heart failed to suggest.

"I am sorry to break up such an interview of congenial spirits," said Mr. Blackman blandly. "I am aware of the prevailing feeling of the boys toward you, Richards——"

"There isn't any such 'feeling,'" broke in Dan a trifle bitterly.

"Oh, that is your modesty which prompts such a worthy suggestion," said the teacher, still more blandly. "I consider such an influence as you wield one of the most potent factors in the life of the Tait School. There was a time in my own younger days when I too might have exerted an influence even more powerful than yours. But I was somewhat handicapped in my time by certain circumstances——"

"You are mistaken, Mr. Blackman. I do not have any such influence as you seem to think I have," broke in Dan impatiently.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Blackman smilingly; "I fancy I am better qualified to judge of that than you are. In my own student days there was a band of rough, I might say even boisterous, lads who were not accessible to the more refined graces. They were not at all intellectual, and consequently I was never comprehended by them or by those who were somewhat molded by their noisy demonstrations."

"Did you play on the baseball nine?" inquired Dan in apparent innocence.

"Not exactly. I was not a member of the regular school nine, but I have a very distinct recollection of a certain specific day when the boys chose sides, I think you call it. One of the boys tossed a bat to another, and then each in turn and successively placed his hand on the bat and above his fellow's until the top of the bat was reached——"

"How many hands did a boy have in those days?" inquired Dan.

"Why two, naturally. Of course his lower hand was withdrawn from its place when the upper hand was placed in its proper position."

"Yes, sir."

"It was quite a unique method of ascertaining which of the rival boys was to have the first selection among the entire assembly of the players of the school."

"Were you the first choice?"

"I fancy not. I never was strongly drawn to the game. But on this particular day I was selected to be one of the contestants."

"Which position did you play?"

"Let me see," said Mr. Blackman, reflecting, "I have a somewhat dimly defined recollection that it was the south base."

"What?"

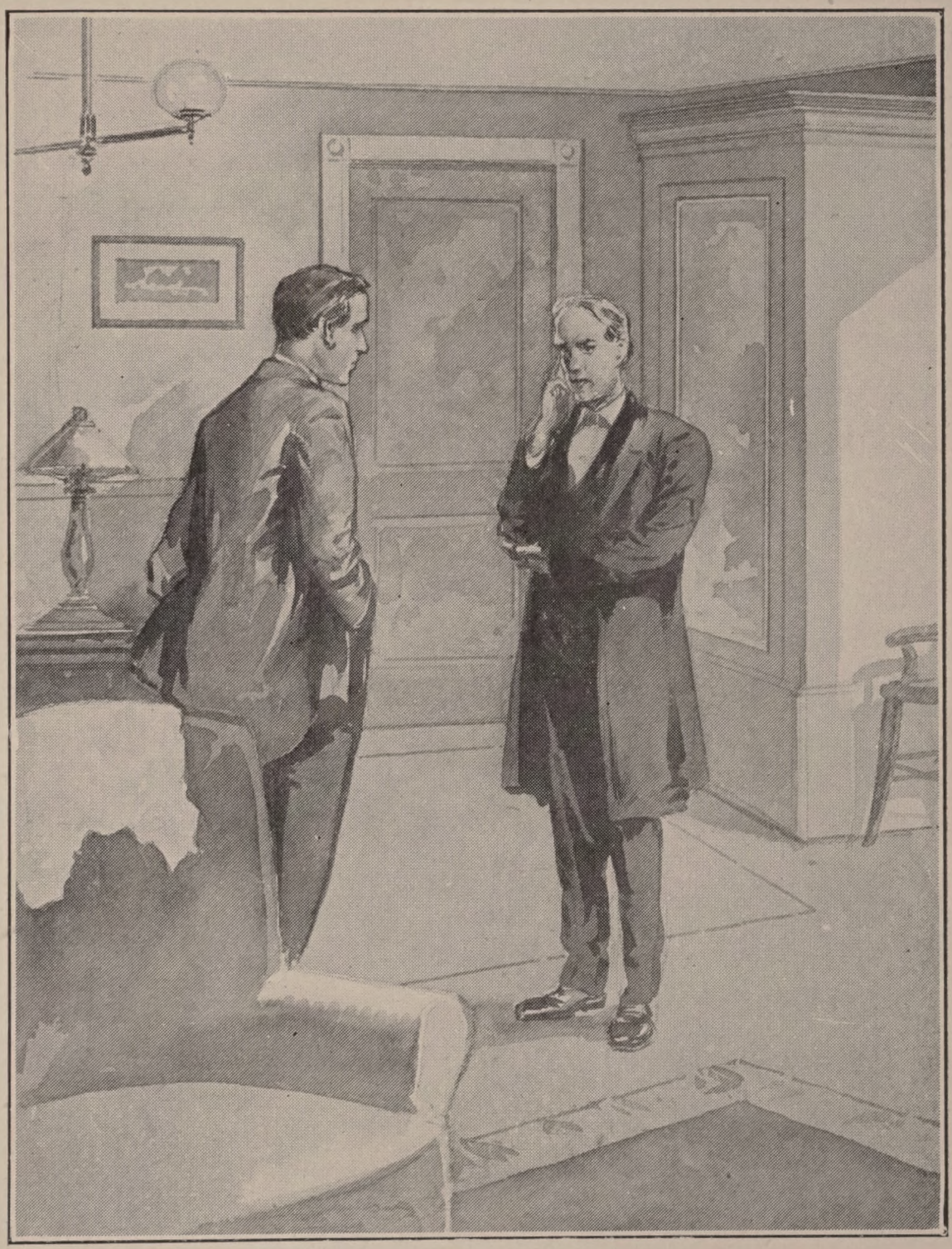
"The south base was the term applied to it, I am quite confident. I was midway between the lad who hurled the ball for the striker and the lad who was playing at middle."

"Second base?"

"No; my recollection is that the position was called south base. I shall never forget my sensation when the boy standing directly in the rear of the striker suddenly and without warning hurled the ball with extreme violence directly at me. I saw that unless I was extremely cautious the vicious ball might permanently injure me, but before I could decide on the proper course to follow the ball struck me, and——"

"Where did it hit you?"

"Directly over the solar plexus. Words cannot describe the agony I suffered. I dropped to the ground, and, almost unconscious, rolled from side to side. I gasped for breath. Indeed, my mouth must have been widely distended in my effort to breathe, for one of the boys quite rudely bade me close it. I



" ' I saw him,' said Dan simply "

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was so severely injured that I was compelled to depart at once, and then only with assistance. Days passed before I fully recovered."

"It is always safer to catch the ball with your hands," suggested Dan dryly.

"So I fancy. But I must not waste time further by talking of my experiences on the athletic field, where I must acknowledge that I was not so successful as I was in the classroom. There I easily led all my competitors. Indeed, with becoming modesty, I assure you that the intellectual precedence which I obtained in school and college has never failed to be of untold assistance. But to come directly to the point—for terseness and brevity are not only the soul of wit, but almost a prerequisite for successful work in life—I should like exceedingly to receive your report concerning your interview with the dastardly youth who dared to desecrate the marble statue of John Tait——"

"I saw him," said Dan simply.

"Did you converse with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! and did he acknowledge his guilt?"

"I did not ask him to do that."

"I expressly requested you——"

"Not to run about and be a spy!" broke in Dan hotly.

"Most assuredly not. Not at all. Not in the least. But I was at some pains to explain to you how by a process of ratiocination inductively applied

I had proved conclusively that Randall was the guilty party."

"And what was I to do?"

"You were to obtain a confession or contributory evidence, if not direct proof."

"You wanted me to be a telltale? Is that it?" asked Dan indignantly.

"You positively misunderstood me."

"I wasn't sure, but I thought I must have misunderstood you, Mr. Blackman; I could not believe that any teacher in the Tait School could want any boy to be a spy or a telltale——"

"Most assuredly not," interrupted Mr. Blackman, his delicate face flushing. "That was the farthest from the purpose I had. I explained to you that I had analyzed the situation, which has been somewhat perplexing, and that I was convinced that Randall was the guilty party. I assured you that if he would come to me with his confession——"

"But I didn't ask him to confess."

"Must I repeat what I already have said several times?" snapped the teacher.

"What was that?"

"Positively, Richards, I am beginning to think that I made a mistake in consenting to your urgent plea to obtain tutoring for you if you would secure this confession from Randall——"

"I did not offer to secure a confession from Randall!" declared Dan hotly, rising from his chair and boldly facing his visitor as he spoke.

"Pardon me, but most assuredly that is exactly what you did."

"I spoke to you about doing some tutoring and you told me you would get me some if I would get Al Randall to come to you and confess that he painted the Tait statue. You made the suggestion, not I——"

"I do not wish you to be disrespectful to me, Richards!" piped the flushed teacher.

"I do not want to be."

"Then why are you?"

"Is it disrespectful to say what I did?"

"Most assuredly."

"I did not intend what I said to be disrespectful. I only wanted to say that I never suggested what you think I did."

"What have you to report?"

"He did not tell me that he did the painting."

"Did you ask him?"

"Not directly."

"I regret that you failed to do as I requested—and, I may say also, as I expected."

Dan was silent, though he was not able entirely to repress the sneer that appeared on his face.

"I am somewhat fearful that I shall not, under the circumstances, be able to offer you much in the way of tutoring."

"That is for you to say."

"Naturally I am disappointed. With your standing as a student and your influence over the boys, I

was confident that you would lend your aid to my efforts to——"

"I couldn't report such things to you," broke in Dan hastily. "It may be all wrong, but the code of honor——"

"A code absolutely false." As Dan did not respond, Mr. Blackman arose, and as he turned to leave the room he said sharply: "There will still be time if you come to see me before eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. We are to hold a teachers' meeting at that time."

Still Dan failed to answer the implied question.

"You are standing in your own light," continued the teacher. "And also in the way of Randall. If he were a little older and wiser he would at once report to me, throw himself upon my mercy, and be let off with a much smaller penalty than will now be the case. Will you inform him of that?"

"I don't think I can promise."

"Very well, Richards."

The teacher departed, and Dan, utterly wretched, flung himself into the chair in front of his desk and did his utmost to study. He held his book in his hand, but for a time his thoughts were of other matters. It was unfair. Here he was charged by the boys, even Walter, with acting as a go-between for the teachers and trying to betray one of his own classmates. Among the boys no charge could be more nearly fatal. And yet he was guiltless, at least of any intentional effort to serve in such a

cause. The outlook was dark, and his position in the Tait School threatened to become almost unbearable.

At last Dan flung his book aside, deciding to put off the work for the day, as he was not in any condition of mind to study a hard list of English sentences to be translated into Latin.

As Dan rose from his chair Walter entered the room, and as soon as Dan looked at him he was aware that his roommate was even more angry than he had been when he and Al Randall had departed at the coming of Mr. Blackman.

"Well, did you tell him everything you had found out?" snapped Walter.

"Not quite," replied Dan, striving to speak indifferently.

"If he doesn't know it now it isn't your fault."

"I don't know that I understand what you mean."

"Oh, you know all right. Who was it that went to Al and put it up to him that he painted the old statue?"

"I told Al just why I came."

"So he said," almost shouted Walter. "Of all the things I ever heard, that is about the worst. Al told me all about it, and his story agrees with yours."

"What did he say?"

"Just what you did."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure? Why, Dan, I'd have slapped him if you

yourself hadn't owned up that you did just what he said you did. I never would have believed it! Never! I can't understand it yet. There isn't a fellow in the Tait School who thinks you'd ever have stooped to such a low-down trick. What have you got against Al, anyway?"

"Nothing."

"He says you have."

"I haven't; I don't care what he says."

"Well, all I can say is that it looks mighty bad, Dan. There isn't anything the fellows hate as they do a chap who tries to get in with the teachers by reporting what the boys are doing."

"Walter, you act as if you'd lost every brain you ever had. Do you honestly believe I'd stoop to do such a thing as that?"

"Yes, sir; I do. I wouldn't have believed it yesterday, but to-day you own up. You say yourself that you went to Al and asked him pointblank whether or not he painted the statue, and you own up too, that Scippie sent you and that you did it all because he wanted you to do it."

"Hold on, Walter. You haven't got it straight. This is——"

"Did you do that?"

"I tell you, you don't see——"

"You can answer my question, can't you?"

"I can."

"Will you then?"

"What is it?"

"Did you or didn't you go to Al with a question Scippie wanted you to ask? Now answer me that, will you?"

"Yes, but——"

"I don't want any 'buts' or 'ifs' or 'ands.' You say you did?"

"Yes, but——"

"That's enough," said Walter, in tones of deep disgust. "That's all I want. I wash my hands of a fellow who'll do that. And that you of all fellows should do it, Dan, is what beats me. But you say you did, and so I must believe you. You won't have a bed of roses in the Tait School from this time on, let me tell you."

CHAPTER XXII

DAN'S FRIEND

WALTER'S prophecy proved speedily to be correct. Before the following day had passed Dan was made aware that his position in the school had changed radically. Instead of the warm greetings and hero-worship which had become more fully a part of his life than he at the time had realized, he now was met with sneers or not infrequently with taunts. The boys seemed to avoid him as pronouncedly as before they had been eager to be where he was. Walter seldom spoke to him, and when a week later Doctor Stevens announced in the school chapel that Albert Randall was suspended for a month, the anger of the boys at Dan blazed forth afresh. Even Ned Davis, who had done his utmost to keep up the form of their friendliness, now apparently was no longer observing even the form.

The sole exception was Carlton, whose loyalty deeply stirred Dan's heart. The little fellow not only dared to show his continued friendliness by seeking out Dan and by being seen often in his company, but he was bold to champion his hero in his absence, and such a stand required courage of no mean order. Carlton apparently was unmoved by

threats or taunts, and remained loyal to Dan, whose friendship he openly boasted on every possible occasion.

To Dan the bitterest experience of all was his changed relation with Mr. Blackman. The teacher was vain and petty, though in his own department he was a scholar of no small attainments. His former attitude of pride and his attempt to show a special fondness for Dan now gave place to one of open dislike. His method of asking the boy questions in the classroom changed too, and often apparently he did his utmost to show this dislike by asking Dan what no schoolboy possibly could know or be expected to know. The sarcasm and implied ridicule which the man used were causes of keen suffering by Dan, particularly so when they were followed by a partly suppressed jeer from the class itself.

There were other even more petty sources of annoyance, and even of suffering for Dan. Postal cards were sent him with "Hello, you telltale!" or similar venomous epithets applied to his name. On the walls of the school buildings, scrawled in awkward boyish handwriting, he saw "Dan Richards, the Tait School spy," and many other forms which were designed to express the contempt of the school for one whom they believed to have betrayed its traditions and beliefs. Under his window the smaller boys stopped at night and unitedly shouted their firm belief that their former hero was a sneak,

a coward, a telltale, or a spy. Dan apparently never heard, but the boys were ready for a speedy departure at any sign of his coming. When groups of boys walked across the campus they occasionally stopped and shouted at Dan's window their opinion of one who sought to curry favor with the teachers ("bootlick" was the term most frequently applied) by betraying one of his own classmates.

Next to the attitude and bearing of his roommate, Dan found the sudden silence that rested over any group of boys that he approached the hardest of all to bear. His presence seemed to act as the approach of a leper might have done. He felt almost that he was an outcast.

Hard as all this was to bear, Dan quietly and resolutely went about his daily work. There were moments when it did not seem to him he could endure another hour in the Tait School, and only the steady encouragement of Doctor Stevens served to hold him to his course. The quiet manner in which the principal met him, and his unshaken confidence that the attitude of the boys would change, were almost his sole helps. Even when Dan declared that to remain and be the recipient of help from unknown sources was no longer possible, it was Doctor Stevens who quietly strengthened the wavering purpose of the suffering boy, and helped to hold him in his place. His spirit of determination was daily becoming stronger, and the very opposition increased his own power to resist.

There was one element, however, in Dan's experience that increased his inability to hold himself in line, and that was his knowledge that he had written an essay for which Watson had paid him according to the agreement made, and that the latter had handed in the document in the contest for the Dodge prize for the best essay. In spite of Dan's effort to assure himself that what he had done was legitimate, and that the general opinion of the boys, if they should learn of what he had done, would be that it was more or less of a joke, and one for which Watson and not he would have to suffer, in his heart Dan knew better, and consequently at times was seriously troubled. He had no question as to what Doctor Stevens would say about his part in the contract, and Dan was well aware also that he would fall in the estimation of the principal.

The thing was not right. The question was not even debatable. Yet what could be done? Dan said this many times to himself in the hours when his troubles were darkest. He could not betray Watson. The very fact that he had received money from his classmate sealed his lips. If Dan had had no one to consider but himself, he would gladly have returned the fee to Watson and washed his hands of the entire affair. But this now seemed impossible. The essay had been delivered to Watson, and twenty-five dollars had been received in the exchange. Besides, that essay, as well as the second which Dan had written and submitted under his own

name in the contest, had passed out of his and his classmate's hands, and now both documents were in the possession of the committee. The situation was doubly complicated and Dan, whatever his desires may have been, felt that he was fast bound by the cords which he had helped to wind about himself.

The slow weeks dragged on, and the winter days apparently brought slight change for the troubled boy. He was seldom with any one now except Carlton, and the latter's devotion produced an effect that was marked upon Dan. Walter and he occasionally spoke, but his impulsive roommate doggedly held to the silence he had maintained, while Dan was too proud to ask for that which might not freely be given.

The sole compensation lay in the fact that there were few distractions in Dan's lonely life, and consequently he devoted much more time than formerly to the preparation of his lessons. As Scippie's petty persecution had ceased long ago, the natural result of Dan's labors was that he was near to, if in fact he was not already occupying, the position of leader of the class.

The return of Al Randall after his suspension had served to inflame afresh the feeling of antagonism to Dan, and Al himself had been the foremost to promote it. What Al's motive might have been in painting the statue of John Tait, Dan was unable to conjecture. Indeed, there were times when he seriously questioned the fact of Al's really being the

boy who was guilty, though he could not even imagine any cause for his silent endurance of his punishment if that was true.

Dan had formed the habit of taking long, solitary walks on the adjacent hills for his sole means of recreation and exercise. One Saturday afternoon in February he was returning from one of these long rambles, and when he was about two miles from the school he saw Carlton approaching in the road in front. "I've been looking for you," panted Carlton, as he drew near.

"What's wrong?" inquired Dan quietly.

"Oh, nothing. Yes, there is too! There's something wrong with you," he added impulsively as he joined his friend and began the descent of the hill.

"What's the matter with me now?" inquired Dan with a smile. "Is it something new? Go ahead, I'm ready."

"No, not so very new. Why don't you go out for the hockey team?"

"I haven't been invited."

"Nobody is asked. Every fellow makes a try—if he wants to. Don't you want to? That was a dandy game with the Goshen team. I tell you, Walter is a slick forward, and Al Randall isn't slow, either, as a cover! Don't you like the game?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you go in for the team?"

Dan smiled and shook his head.

"Look here," exclaimed Carlton, "you're as obstinate as an old mule! and that's what every fellow in the school says."

"I'm afraid that isn't all they say about me."

"You're making a big mistake."

"I believe I've heard you say something like that before," said Dan, smiling.

"Of course you have, but all the fellows say so too."

"What other fellows?"

"Oh, Walter and Ned and——"

"They haven't said so to me," interrupted Dan.

"You don't expect them to, do you?"

"Why, if they are talking that way it would seem as if I was the one to whom they would say something of the kind."

"Now see here, Dan, I want to tell you something."

"Go ahead. I am extending the entire length of my ears in your direction."

"Don't be foolish."

"I'll try not to be. You were about to tell me something."

"Yes, I've just come from your room; Walter and Ned and Watson and Al and some other fellows were there. They were talking about you."

"Were they?" Dan's words were spoken in an attempt to seem indifferent, but the sudden change in the expression of his face was not lost by his shrewd little companion.

"That's what they were."

"How do you know?"

"I was there."

"You're always 'there.' I don't see how it happens——"

"Oh, they can put me out if they want to," broke in Carlton; "but if they don't, I'm just in that much. See? Now, don't you want to know what the fellows said?"

"Do you want to tell me?" responded Dan, looking keenly into the face of his companion.

"What do you suppose I followed you up here for?"

"I thought you might want to take a walk."

"Don't you believe it!"

"All right, I won't," replied Dan smilingly.

"Are you going to pitch for the nine this spring?" asked Carlton abruptly.

"Do the boys want me to pitch?" asked Dan, striving to appear indifferent, but unable to conceal his eagerness.

"You talk as if you were born yesterday. Now I wouldn't blame you a little bit if you should leave the fellows in a hole. They made it for themselves."

"Never mind that," interrupted Dan hastily. "Go on with your story."

"I will, as soon as you tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"Whether you're going to pitch or not."

" Tell me what you have to say, and then I'll know better what to answer you."

Carlton hesitated a moment, and then looking eagerly up into Dan's face he said, " All right, I'll tell you."

CHAPTER XXIII

ANOTHER GO-BETWEEN

"I WAS there in your room," began Carlton, "talking to Walter and telling him what a fool he was——"

"That was certainly candid," suggested Dan.

"Candid? That's no name for it, though I don't know just what the word means. I was telling him that the school needed you on the hockey team——"

"I never played but one game of hockey in all my life."

"I didn't say you had, did I? That hasn't anything to do with the case! I was telling that fool chum of yours that he and his fellow idiots were just fixing things up fine for the nine this spring."

"How was that?"

"Why, if they were trying to shut you out, they couldn't do anything better than just what they had been doing for the past three months."

"What did they say?"

"I thought you'd wake up. Oh, I gave it to 'em—hot shot, straight from the shoulder, right between the eyes."

"Poor Walter!"

"You'd say 'poor Walter,' if you'd seen him sit

up and listen. He told me first off that I might better attend to the affairs that concerned little Carlton, but I didn't pay any attention to him—I just kept right on and let him have it out. I told him how the fellows were getting tired of his game, and they didn't more than half believe you ever were a spy for Scippie or had ever reported what Al told you as a secret——" The lad stopped and looked wistfully at his companion as if he was waiting for Dan to confirm what he had said.

"Go on," said Dan quietly, apparently ignoring the unspoken appeal.

"Well, I told those fellows all that—you see, Ned and Al and the others had come in by this time—and I told them too, that I didn't believe the fellows would stand for it when it came to the baseball games this spring. They know just as well as the rest of us that if you don't pitch we don't stand a ghost of a show with the academy."

"Of course they didn't believe you," began Dan, unable entirely to hide the eagerness of his inquiry.

"Of course they did believe me," retorted Carlton. "And every mother's son of them knew it was the cold facts I was giving them."

"Did they own up that they did?"

"In a way—yes. Look here, Dan Richards, if you'd just let me explain how it was that you got into that mess, I can tell you right here and now that the whole thing would be cleared up in just three minutes by the clock."

"I haven't done anything to clear up," responded Dan in a low voice.

"You've got something to explain then."

"Not in the way you want me to."

"You're the most mulish fellow in the Tait School. You are——"

"Yes, I know I am," broke in Dan. "Let it go at that. The fellows said that if I would just come around and say I was sorry I had been a spy and a telltale, and would promise never to do so any more, they'd call everything off and let me pitch for the nine."

"How do you know they did?" demanded Carlton, looking at Dan in surprise. "You weren't there."

"Never mind how I know," said Dan. "Then Al blocked that by saying if I should come begging for a place on the nine that he'd give up his position quicker than a wink. He wouldn't play on the same nine with me——"

"Who told you all that?"

"Go on with your story."

"Well, that was the run of the whole thing. Everybody wanted you to pitch, that is, almost everybody——"

"All except Al," suggested Dan as his companion hesitated.

Carlton again looked in astonishment at his hero and said: "You beat everything I ever saw. You must have heard them talking or somebody has told

you everything that was said. The straight truth is that they all, except Al, want you for the pitcher this spring, but they don't know just how to fix it. If you'd make the first move they'd meet you more than half-way."

"But they still think I'm a spy. They want me on the nine, and every one of them will shut his eyes to the other things if I'll agree to play. Is that it?"

"Not quite."

"What is it then?"

"If you'll call everything off, they will too."

"But I haven't done anything to 'call off.'"

"There you go again! You must have ears two feet long."

"But I really haven't."

"Don't you want to—to——" the younger boy stammered and stopped in confusion.

"I know what you were going to say," suggested Dan quietly. "You wanted to know if I wasn't tired of the way the fellows are treating me."

"But aren't you?" persisted Carlton.

"Am I tired?" repeated Dan almost fiercely. "Let me tell you, Carlton, there's only one thing that has kept me from leaving the whole thing."

"What's that?"

"I sha'n't tell you—yet."

"You're going to stay?"

"I expect to stay."

"Fine!" exclaimed Carlton, instantly so relieved

that his companion laughed. "I guess it'll all come out right."

"I don't know about that."

"You care, don't you?"

"Yes; but I don't care enough about it to do what the fellows sent you out here to tell me to do."

"They didn't send me."

"You told them you were coming?"

"Yes, I guess so. Of course I told them. What of it?"

Dan smiled and did not answer his companion's question.

"They told me to come on, and said that if you'd agree, they would, and call everything off. You'll do that, won't you?" pleaded Carlton.

"They want me to confess?"

"Don't put it that way."

"How shall I put it?"

"Say you'll agree to meet the fellows half-way."

"It isn't that. I'd never stand a minute for a little thing like that. But I can't say that to them."

"To whom?"

"Why, to Al. Besides, they know it already."

"No they don't. If you'd just say it, the whole thing would be done."

"You tell me what I might say."

"Why—why—that you didn't squeal on Al Randall and that you didn't go to ask him if he painted old Jack because Scippie sent you."

Dan shook his head. "You're putting it in the

wrong way. Suppose I should go to Doctor Stevens and say to him, "I'm sorry, doctor, but I didn't hit you in the eye."

"Nobody hit him."

"That's the point."

"Well, if it is, just say so. You can do that much, can't you?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"You know as well as if I had told you. He said a lot of things which he knows were not so; that is, the way he told them made them rank lies, but they had something to stand on after all. Now I am not the one to go to him and apologize."

"Oh, this is the worst ever! Then you won't call it off?"

"As far as I'm concerned I can't call it off. I didn't begin it. I haven't done anything."

"You'll certainly drive me to drink!" exclaimed Carlton in despair.

"Oh, no," laughed Dan. "You go back to the fellows that sent you out here——"

"They didn't send me, I told you."

"I know. You go back and tell those fellows that I say I haven't anything to call off or to take back."

"And you'll pitch for the nine?"

"That hasn't anything to do with this thing."

"Yes, it has. I don't believe you mean to pitch at all. And last year you had fifteen strike-outs in one game."

"That was last year."

"Where are you going now?" inquired Carlton as his companion stopped when the two boys arrived at the campus.

"To the library."

"All right, I'll see you later," called Carlton as he ran hastily, and manifestly relieved, toward the dormitory.

Dan stopped on the steps of the library and watched the boy as he sped along the path, well aware of what his purpose, as well as his destination, was to be. Then he sought the library.

When Dan returned to his room, he found that Walter was there alone, and there was also a marked change in the manner of his roommate. It was plain that he was interested in something, though Dan did not know what it was, and that he was desirous of talking with his roommate.

"Carlton seen you?" inquired Walter.

"Yes," replied Dan quietly. "He met me up on the road on Wolf's Hill."

"He said he did. He said too, that you were going to pitch this spring."

"Did he?"

"Yes, he did. There's only one thing that stands in the way. I wish you would tell me straight, Dan, whether or not you took any money for that game you pitched last summer."

"And if I did?"

"Why, the truth of the matter is that we have

just received a letter from the manager of the academy nine."

"Have you? It's early in the season, isn't it?"

"It isn't a question of whether it's early or not, but of whether you were paid for pitching last summer."

"Did the academy fellows go to all that trouble?"

"They were mighty glad to go to it. They have heard from somebody that you did what I say and they say they're going to make trouble about it if you try to pitch this spring on our team."

"I don't want any trouble."

"No. We'll fix that all right. It isn't the first time the academy has tried to turn some dirty trick, and we weren't born yesterday, either."

"If I don't pitch here this spring, that won't make any difference, will it?"

"But you're going to pitch. Carlton said you told him you would."

"He took a good deal upon himself to say that."

"Didn't you mean it?"

"Walter, did he tell you the condition he made, or rather the one which he said you and the other fellows made?"

"What was that?" inquired Walter.

"Don't you know?"

"Was it about making up with the fellows?"

"You've hit it the first time."

"Probably Carlton made that up——"

"No, he just reported what was said to him," broke in Dan.

"Well, what of it? That can all be fixed up, I told you. I'll find a way, but the main thing is did you get any money for pitching that game?"

"I did. Five dollars."

"Who paid you?"

"Nobody paid me."

"I don't see——"

"You will when I tell you," interrupted Dan, smiling at his roommate for the first time in weeks.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN OLIVE BRANCH

IT was this way," explained Dan. "I promised my cousin, Rolla Leonard, who lives in Millport —that is about ten miles from Rodman—that I would pitch for their nine one game last summer. I knew the fellows and had played there a good many times, when I had been visiting Rolla. Well, this time I pitched just as I had done before. That's the whole story—almost."

"What's the rest of it?"

"At the close of the game a man named Mr. Staples, who used to live in Millport when he was a boy and happened to be back there when this game I'm telling you about was played, was about the most excited spectator we had. Finally, after the game was ended and we had won——"

"What was the score?" broke in Walter.

"Eleven to nothing."

Walter's face beamed as he said, "How many did you strike out?"

"I think it was fourteen."

"Go on with your story."

"There isn't much to tell, and I don't know that I ought to tell even that; but Mr. Staples came to

me after the game and asked me a few questions about my work here in the Tait School, and what my plans were, and then he handed me a five-dollar bill. When I looked at it and then looked at him, he laughed and said: 'That's a little present. You're to use it in the school for something you otherwise wouldn't get. This is an extra.' So I thanked him and took it."

"And there wasn't any bargain?"

"No."

"No one agreed to pay you before you pitched?"

"No, nor after I pitched either."

"Good. Every one has a right to take a gift if he wants it. That makes everything all straight. Of course the academy fellows will say it looks a little 'fishy,' but I guess we can force it through. Our nerve is good."

"This doesn't require any 'nerve.' This is absolutely true just as I am telling you. The money was a present, and I was surprised when Mr. Staples gave it to me."

"I'm afraid that will be a little hard to prove."

"No, it won't."

"How will you do it?"

"I'll get a statement from Mr. Staples himself. I know he'll give it."

"Will he? Well, I'm not so sure about that, but it will be a good thing to try it on anyway. The way the academy fellows found out what you had been doing was through the same man. He has a

nephew or something or other who is in the academy, and somehow he heard about your 'present' as you call it——"

"I call it just exactly what it was," broke in Dan a bit angrily.

"Oh, I know what a straight conscience you've got——"

"No. You don't know anything about that. But what I'm telling you is just exactly the way it was."

"I'm not disputing that," laughed Walter. "All I want is to get it in such a shape that the academy fellows can't throw it out when our committee has its next meeting."

"You don't act as if you thought that I——"

"Oh, yes I do," began Walter hastily. "Of course the main trouble is that there never is a straight bargain to pay a fellow just so much if he'll pitch. Sometimes the money is handed to him in an envelope without any name, sometimes it——"

"But I tell you, I didn't expect any pay, and I was completely surprised when Mr. Staples handed me that present."

"Yes, yes, I know. I understand," said Walter still more hastily, fearful of arousing an obstinate streak in his roommate's nature. It was plain to Dan too, that Walter was doing his utmost to open the way for him to play on the nine in the approaching season.

And Dan in his heart was eager to be one of the school nine. His experiences in the preceding year

were still fresh in his mind. Can one ever forget the applause of his fellows, the pride in his work, and the response to the success he has achieved? Perhaps too, the hard experience of the recent weeks through which Dan had passed served to strengthen his desire to be received once more on good terms by his fellows.

"Now, Dan," resumed Walter, "there's just one other thing you've got to do."

"Only one?"

"Yes, of any great importance."

"Well, tell me what it is."

"I suspect you know already. In plain English, you've got to square yourself with the fellows, and the sooner you do it the better for every one."

"If I don't?"

"Then I don't believe you'll be the pitcher of our nine this spring. Al says he'd rather lose every game we play than to have a fellow on the team who stands as you do before this school. I'm not mealy-mouthed on mincing matters, Dan, and that is just exactly how the thing stands to-day. You know it just as well as I do."

"I think you'd better go on and explain," said Dan in a low voice.

"As I understand it, Scippie wanted you to go to Al and put it straight to him whether he painted the old statue or not. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"And you went?"

"Yes."

"And asked Al the question?"

"Yes."

"And then reported to Scippie?"

"I went back and told Mr. Blackman that——"

"And yet you don't know that there is anything to square up," broke in Walter, his anger returning.

"No."

"I'd just like to know what you call it, anyway?"

"What I did? Is that what you mean?"

"You know it is. Don't pose."

"I'm not posing," retorted Dan, his eyes flashing. "You know that as well as I do."

"Well, what of it?"

"Everything of it. What I've said to you is true, but it isn't all the truth. If you can let Al Randall make you believe that I would try to spy on him and report to the teachers, then anything I could say to explain it wouldn't amount to anything. I don't think I shall ask his permission in that way to play on the Tait School nine."

"But you can explain; I know you can," protested Walter in his fear that his roommate would refuse to take the way the boys had planned the time when Carlton was in the room and hastily departed to carry their message for Dan.

"I don't intend to crawl before Al."

"You put it the hardest way you can."

"It isn't the hardest—it's the impossible. I simply sha'n't do it."

"Don't you want to pitch this spring?"

"Not badly enough for that."

"How would you fix it up then?"

"I don't intend to 'fix' it up at all. If Al Randall can dictate just what you must do and what I must say before I'll be allowed to play ball, then I think I'll let him do all the rest."

"But you'll have to own up that Al has something on his side."

"What?" demanded Dan sharply.

"Why, he was sent home, for one thing, and then——"

"Tell me why he was suspended?"

"The teacher said he painted the statue."

"Didn't he?"

"Honestly, I don't know, Dan. Do you?"

"No."

"Do you believe he did?"

"I don't know anything about it. He said he knew who did it; the teachers thought he was the guilty——"

"Yes," broke in Walter, "but Al says they believed that because you told them he did it."

"You know that was a lie."

"Didn't you tell Scippie that?"

"Never."

"What did you tell him?"

"I didn't 'tell him' anything. He came to me one day with a long rigmarole about his having decided that Al Randall painted the statue. It seems

not another teacher believed it at the time and Scippie was patting himself on the head as being the noblest as well as the shrewdest Roman of them all. I almost laughed in his face when he told me that Al did it, and I told him that I was so sure that he hadn't, that I'd be perfectly willing to ask him myself."

"Go on," said Walter, staring at his companion.

"That's all there is to it, except that when I asked him about it he said he knew who did it, and that was all he said; oh, yes, he said too, that he charged me with trying to spy on him and reporting to Scippie what I found out. I began then to think, after all, that Al might be the fellow that wielded the brush. I didn't know what to make of his performances. Anyway——"

"He is queer sometimes," interrupted Walter. "And you didn't start the teachers after him; you didn't report to them——?"

"You've got your cart before your horse. The teachers, at least Scippie, thought he was guilty. I didn't believe, then, a word of it."

"That's a new side to it."

"It needn't have been 'new' if you'd asked me two months ago," said Dan a little bitterly.

"There's only one thing more that puzzles me."

"What is that?"

"Why, Al says that Scippie himself told him that he promised you that if you would find out about Al that he would get you some tutoring. Did he?"

"He did promise to get me some tutoring, and he did tell me he thought Al was guilty and all the rest of it, though he did not make any condition—at least directly. Do you suppose he really told Al that?"

"Al says he did."

"That doesn't make it so. I'm going to ask Scippie. He hasn't acted for a while as if I was a special pet of his."

"That's right," laughed Walter. "Al said that was all a bluff, just to make the fellows believe that he was not favoring you."

"Do you believe that?" asked Dan a little bitterly.

"I didn't know what to think. You'll have to own up that some things looked mighty queer, now didn't they?"

"They did to me. Here's a new fellow in school—nobody knows who he is and he says he himself doesn't know. You certainly have known me a good deal longer than that, and if you thought I was such a petty and small fellow as to be a go-between, especially when you never asked me about it and took the word of Al for it all, why, I just made up my mind that you would have to, that's all."

"It did look queer, Dan," pleaded Walter.

"It did if you wanted it to. Last year Gus Kiggins[1] made a fool of you. This year it's Al Randall. Now who'll be the next, nobody on earth knows."

[1] See "The Pennant."

Dan was not speaking harshly, but he was looking directly into the eyes of his roommate.

Walter's face flushed darkly and for a moment it looked as if he was deeply angry, but in a brief time he held out his hand and said in a low voice: "That hits pretty hard, Dan, and I'm not just sure it isn't a little below the belt; but I understand. You haven't been having what you'd call a picnic for the past few weeks."

"Not exactly," responded Dan, his eyes glowing.

"As far as I am concerned," continued Walter, "I'd be glad to call it all off and go back where we were before this trouble began."

"So would I," said Dan eagerly. "I never blamed you as much as I did——"

"There! let it go. I know I haven't shown much backbone, but the place where it ought to be is sore and I don't want even you to keep harping on the same string. It might break, you know."

The boys were each looking with glowing eyes into the other's face. It was impossible to determine which was the more rejoiced at the end of the long period of trouble.

"The fellows will be glad when I tell them," said Walter.

"What are you going to tell them?"

"Just what you told me."

"Not just yet."

"Why not?" asked Walter. "You aren't going back on what you said?"

"About explaining to Al?" inquired Dan with a smile.

"No! No! The other thing! You know what I mean."

"I don't know," said Dan thoughtfully.

"Well, I do. You'll be just as glad as I am to have this mess settled."

"Of course, but I'm not just sure that it will be settled—in your way. Wait! I must do one thing before you say a word to anybody about it."

CHAPTER XXV

THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

LEAVING his roommate mystified by his sudden departure, Dan hastened to Watson's room for an interview which he had long been wanting to have, but which even now he dreaded. What would the boy say to it? Would he be willing to "call off" the bargain? Dan was not at all certain that his classmate would listen to what he might say to him, but as for himself he felt that under the change which had come in his relations with Walter, it was no longer possible for him to let his bargain with Watson remain. Besides, apparently Al Randall knew of it, and that was an additional reason for adjusting the matter, although Dan was confident Watson would not be altogether willing to change.

"Hello, Dan!" called Watson, when the former had been bidden to enter after he had announced his presence by a noisy rap. "I haven't seen you for an age."

"I haven't been very far away," responded Dan quietly, as he seated himself.

"Yes, I know," said Watson, in some confusion. "I'm glad to see you. It's a pity you didn't try for the hockey team this year."

"Is it?"

"Yes; I've seen you skate like a breeze. You would have made a dandy forward. Why didn't you come out for the team?"

"I wasn't wanted and I wasn't——"

"What do you want? An invitation engraved and then signed by the school?"

"No."

"Well, it's a shame you aren't on the team. That's all I've got to say about it."

"I haven't been sorry."

"Say, Dan," said Watson impulsively, "what is the true inwardness of all this row, anyway? I'm sick to death of the whole thing. Al Randall didn't have any ground for talking about you as he did, now did he?"

"I don't know what he 'talked.'"

"Honestly, don't you know what he said you did?"

"I heard some reports," said Dan dryly.

"Well, that's what I mean. There wasn't anything in it, now was there?"

"That I was a spy and a go-between?"

"Yes."

"Watson, do you think there was?"

"I didn't want to believe it. It wasn't a bit like you. I—I——"

Dan smiled at the manifest confusion of his classmate as he said, "What made you believe it if you didn't want to?"

"Well, you see, Al said, and you didn't deny, and the fellows all thought if you did tell Scippie——" Watson again stopped in such confusion that his visitor smiled.

"There was a way out of it."

"Why didn't you take it, then?" asked Watson eagerly. "The fellows all said if there was anything to say you wouldn't keep still. Al was talking good and plenty all the time and you just kept quiet and didn't deny anything——"

"Why didn't somebody come to me and ask me?" interrupted Dan tartly. "Never mind about that now. I've come here to give you back your money," he added, as he held forth the pieces of gold which his classmate had given him for his essay.

"What's that for?" exclaimed Watson, aghast.

"It's for you."

"But that isn't mine. It's yours. You earned it. You——"

"I can't keep it," broke in Dan.

"Why can't you keep it?"

"Did you ever hear of 'thirty pieces of silver'?"

"No. What are you talking about? This money is yours. Isn't it enough?"

"That isn't it."

"Well, what is the trouble, then?"

"I can't take it."

"But why can't you take it? You didn't seem to be squeamish when you wrote——"

"That is so. I can't do it now, though."

"But I have handed in my essay. I can't get it back now."

"That is for you, not for me, to settle. All I can say is that I can't keep the money."

"I guess you know what you're doing, but I can't see any sense in it," said Watson helplessly. "I must say you beat me. Say, Dan," he suddenly added, "has anything been said—did the teachers find out——"

"Only one person has spoken to me about it. Don't you know who it was?" inquired Dan meaningly, as he looked straight into the boy's eyes.

"I can't think who it was."

"Think hard."

"Was it Ned?"

"No."

"Hodge?"

"No."

"Was it Walter?"

"Did you tell him?"

"I never breathed a word to him. Honestly, I didn't."

"All right, I'll take your word. Now think again and see if you can't——"

"Was it Al Randall?" broke in Watson.

"That's a pretty good guess."

"But I never said a word to him about it."

"How did he know then?"

"I never knew he did know. That beats me."

"Didn't he ever say anything to you about it?"

"Not a word."

"And you're sure you never told him?"

"I'm dead certain. Why should I? I'd be the last person in the world to squeal about it."

"It would seem so. He knows, anyway."

"How do you know he does?"

"He twitted me about it."

"He did? When?"

"Oh, it was away back, when he said I was a——"

"Sure about it?"

"Yes."

"And that is why you don't want my money?"

"No."

"Then what is the reason?"

"It's because I know it."

"Of course you know it," said Watson, now completely mystified. "You couldn't help knowing it if I paid you, could you?"

"I guess not," answered Dan, smiling as he spoke.

"Then you don't know any more now than you did when you took it."

"Oh, yes I do. I know a good deal more."

"You beat me! But, Dan, I can't get the essay back."

"If you can't, then don't. That's for you to say, not for me."

"You didn't expect me to do that, did you?"

"No. I didn't 'expect' you would," replied Dan, smiling slightly as he saw that Watson failed to note

the slight emphasis which he had given "expect." What Dan "hoped" or "wished" might have been different from what he "expected" if his desires had been carried out; he did not explain.

"Well, that's all right, then," said Watson with a sigh of manifest relief. "Of course I'm mighty sorry you won't keep the money I gave you. If it isn't all right I'll make it up——"

"It isn't that," broke in Dan sharply. "You've told me a half dozen times you'd give me more, when the fact is I don't want any."

"I thought you—you know you said—the fact is, I understood you wanted to——"

"To earn some money?"

"That's it exactly."

"I do."

"Then I don't see——"

"No, you don't see," suggested Dan with a smile. "It's because I see that I am giving you back the money you paid me."

"Of course you won't say anything about what you did for me?"

"If you still think you'll hand in that essay I shall stick to my promise."

"Of course I shall hand it in. I've got to—in fact, it is in already. You know what I told you about my father? Well, I don't know what he'd do if I shouldn't have any essay."

"Can't you write one?"

"Who, me? I write one? Well, you're either

kidding' me, or you're the most innocent chap in the whole Tait School. If you'd ask me to drive the puck through the side of the rink to-morrow night, or make three home runs this spring, either of them would be easy music compared with asking me to write an essay for the prize."

"You may not get the prize."

"Of course," acknowledged Watson frankly. "I took my chances on that. But even if I don't get the prize I'll have the essay, won't I?"

"What good will that do you?"

"I'll have it to give to my father. Oh, you don't know him. He's as hard as nails with me some ways. He can't or simply won't see that I haven't any brains for this sort of thing, and yet he keeps right on crowding me. He says he's going to make a doctor out of me. Isn't that great? Just think of me prescribing! Why, you wouldn't trust me to look after a sick dog, now would you?"

"You're a good fellow, Watson," said Dan cordially, "but I'll have to own up that I don't think I'd want you for a physician. What do you want to do?"

"I want to be a farmer. Why, Dan, there's nothing in the wide world I love as I do a farm——"

"Maybe that's because you never have lived on one," laughed Dan. "I have, you know."

"Yes, I have lived on one three summers. I don't mean your little dinky seven-by-nine piece of rock and sand you call a farm in these parts. I mean a

place out West big enough to live in, when a poor old winded team of horses doesn't do your plowing, but things move by steam or electricity. I've tried it, and that's the life for me! I abominate the city where I live. Oh, it's a pretty good sort of a town; I was born there, and I don't mean to go back on the place. But I mean the city as compared with the country. No crowded streets, no tight shoes and stiff shirts, no frills, and no shines. Give me the open air with plenty of room to move in and with great crops of grain and horses that don't look as if they'd forgotten how it felt to step on the ground. I mean of dirt, not on asphalt or brick."

"And your father won't let you do it?"

"No, sir. He's going to make a doctor man out of me," said Watson so ruefully that Dan's heart was touched as he smiled at the picture of his classmate's woe.

"Maybe he won't when he finds out that is the thing you really want more than anything else," he suggested.

"You don't know him," said Watson, shaking his head. "He decided that I must hand in an essay for that prize. Well, I handed one in, didn't I?"

"Not very much of a one."

"Perhaps it isn't, but it's the best I could do."

"No, it isn't, if you'd write one on your reasons for believing that farming is the coming profession for young fellows."

"But there aren't such subjects ever given! Just

think what we had here, a choice of any one out of three: 'Was Aaron Burr a Traitor?' 'Life in Rome in the Days of Cicero,' and 'Macbeth.' Fine assortment, wasn't it? Real good live topics that just appeal to a fellow with my little pint-cup of brains. Let me see, what was the subject of my essay?"

"'Was Aaron Burr a Traitor?'" replied Dan laughingly.

"Ah, yes! So it was! Let me see, was I for or against him?"

"Against him."

"That's right. I'd almost forgotten. I showed Uncle Aaron up as the real, simon-pure, unadulterated article, didn't I?"

"You did," assented Dan, feeling that he had just seen a side of Watson's life which before had been unknown or at least unrecognized. And his heart went out in sympathy. After all, no one was entirely free from his own peculiar difficulties. It would be easy for him, Dan thought, to face Watson's unreasonable father; but on the other hand, he had already seen that his classmate was without any understanding of the troubles of Dan Richards.

"I don't yet understand what it is you're after," said Watson, as his visitor turned to depart; "but as long as you agree that you won't give anything away about the essay—you do agree to that, don't you?" he added suddenly.

"I told you I would keep that to myself if you wanted me to."

"I do want you to, and I shall depend on you to stick to it."

Dan, though somewhat hurt by the implied lack of confidence which the repeated requests implied, was full of sympathy for his classmate as he slowly walked back to his room. The "thirty pieces of silver" were no longer a load for him to carry. He had slight hope that Watson, if by any chance the essay he had sent in should win the prize, would be able to pass as the true winner. Already Dan fancied that he could hear the derisive remarks of the boys if Watson should be declared the successful contestant. No one would take his success seriously. After all, Dan assured himself, he had done his utmost and he was not free to tell Watson what he must do. The entire work was shameful, but now in doing what he had he had placed himself in a position where he no longer was compelled to hear the clinking of the "thirty pieces of silver."

The fact too, that the long break between himself and Walter was almost healed was an additional source of comfort. How good it seemed to have his roommate more like his former self. As for the other boys—they too would be friendly again now that Walter had led the way.

Cheered by the thoughts, Dan bounded up the stairway and burst into his room, but he stopped in astonishment at the sight he beheld.

CHAPTER XXVI

A MYSTERIOUS GIFT

WALTER and Al Randall were standing facing each other in the center of the room. Each was angry, and the loud tones of their voices were easily heard in the hallway. In surprise Dan stopped abruptly and in silence looked at the two boys.

"Here is the pious fraud now! He can speak for himself!" shouted Al, as he became aware of Dan's presence in the room. "What have you got to say for yourself?" he added, as he turned toward the newcomer.

"About what?" inquired Dan quietly.

"Don't answer him. Don't say a word, Dan!" exclaimed Walter.

"That's what he has been doing most of the time for the past two months," said Al sneeringly. "He has shut up like a clam, and very likely because his brain is about the size of a clam's."

"What is the trouble, anyway?" asked Dan again.

"You know. Don't you try to pose any more!" shouted Al.

"Oh, all the trouble there is," explained Walter, "is that Al is trying to say that Scippie never sent

you at all when you went to him about the painted mourning-bands on old John Tait. I told him to go to Scippie and find out for himself. That was all right, wasn't it?"

"If he wants to go," said Dan quietly.

"Suppose I don't want to? Just suppose I don't believe a word of it—I'll tell you what I'll do," Al Randall added abruptly, "I'll put it right up to you again. What do you say? Did you or didn't you report to Scippie what I said to you? Now answer me straight, and I'll take your word for it. That's perfectly fair. I'll leave it to the whole Tait School if it isn't."

"Don't you pay any attention to him, Dan. He hasn't any right to put up a game like that. I've tried to explain to him just how it was, but he hasn't any more sense than a crazy man," said Walter.

"Never mind, Walter," said Dan. "I guess I can tell him. Now Al, as I understand it, you say you're willing to take my word. Is that so?"

"That's what I said," growled Al.

"Well, I give you my word, then, that I didn't try to spy on you and I didn't come to you just to find out some things and then report you. I came straight to you just because I wanted to help you and get some of the tangled things straightened out. I wanted——"

"Never mind what you wanted," interrupted Al. "All I want is your word that you didn't report to

Scippie. You can answer that question 'Yes' or 'No,' and clear up the whole thing."

"No, I can't either."

"Want to crawl, do you?" sneered Al.

"No, I don't want to crawl," retorted Dan hotly. "I want you to take it straight from me that I gave you my word. I can't do any more."

"Can't say 'Yes' or 'No'?"

"Either wouldn't be the right answer."

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"Because some things would have to be explained."

"I guess they would! You're right about that! Only there are some things that can't be 'explained,' no matter what you say. You've pulled the wool over your chum's eyes, but I can still see out of mine, thank you. You get me sent home for a month and have me branded as I have been and you'll understand how I feel toward a sneaking spy."

"Look here, Al," said Dan suddenly. "You told me a minute ago that you would take my word. I'll tell you now, that I'll take yours if you'll give it to me that you didn't paint John Tait."

"I told you I knew who did the job."

"Did you do it?"

"Want to run and report to Scippie?"

"I don't want you to do anything if you don't want to——"

"Oh, thank you; thank you so much," laughed Al. "Well, I'm going to tell you something I

haven't told anybody else. I did not paint that statue."

"You didn't?" exclaimed Dan and Walter together.

"That's what I said."

"Why didn't you say so long ago?" demanded Walter.

"I didn't have to."

"But you were sent home."

"Don't I know that, and don't I know I haven't any home, either!" retorted Al Randall bitterly.

"But why did you stand for it when you didn't do it?"

"Because a certain sneak——" began Al.

"But you said all the time that you knew," interrupted Walter.

"I did know——"

"And yet you stood for the suspension even when you knew all the time that you weren't guilty, and yet you knew who did the trick."

"Did the one who did paint the statue know that you knew?"

"He most assuredly did."

"Sure?"

"If you'd have heard him beg you'd have thought he had an inkling, anyway, that I saw through him."

"And he kept still and let the whole thing fall on you?" inquired Walter in amazement.

"You didn't hear any remarks, did you?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, that may be one reason why I'll be sitting up nights thinking of the good work Dan Richards did in running to Scippie with his story of how I daubed the old boy with paint. Bah! I'd rather be in my place than in his any day."

"Are you giving this thing straight?" asked Walter excitedly.

"Yes; but I don't expect you to run and tell it," Al added, as he turned again and glared at Dan.

A moment later Al left the room, his anger unabated, and his bitter feeling toward Dan unchanged.

"He beats me!" said Walter thoughtfully. "I don't understand Al at all. Sometimes he's as fine a fellow as I ever knew, and then again he'll have a grouch so big that he can't carry it alone."

"He hasn't carried the one he had for me 'alone,'" said Dan quietly.

"No use in going over all that again," spoke up Walter quickly, frowning slightly as he spoke. Now that he had acknowledged his mistake he expected all others to look upon what he had done much as he himself saw it. Understanding this trait of his friend, Dan said no more about his feeling in the matter and the subject was dropped.

The change in the feeling, or at least in the manifestation of the feeling, of the school toward Dan speedily became plain. Although no one apparently knew just why, the taunts no longer were called after him, his name was no more seen on the walls of the hallways, and the boys no longer evaded him. All

this naturally was pleasing to Dan as he steadily held himself to his work. He was present at two games of the hockey team, and though he was urged to try for a place, he quietly declined on the ground that it was too late in the season to practise, and besides, he was holding himself for the work of the nine—the latter being an excuse that, in the minds of most of his fellow students, absolved him from any further obligation.

Gradually the former cordial relations with his particular friends were renewed—Smith, Ned Davis, Hodge—and others apparently being as glad as Dan was at the resumption of the good times. Dan made no reference to his days of trial, and not one of his classmates spoke of them, though every one was still conscious of the scar that remained.

Al Randall was the one exception. He steadily and sturdily refused to have anything to do with Dan, either ignoring him or leaving any room in which he chanced to be if Dan entered it. Little Carlton Hall, still so called derisively in spite of the foot or more which had been added to his stature, was still Dan's most devoted follower and champion. Now that Carlton himself was looking forward to a share in the athletic contests of the school, he looked to his hero for direction, and was equally faithful in his efforts to defend Dan whenever occasion demanded.

"Some day I'm going to do something for you, Carlton," resumed Walter quizzically. "Did you

ever happen to hear of a gentleman named Boswell?" he added.

"Was he ever in the Tait School?"

"No, I fancy he never had that tremendous advantage," replied Walter in a mock solemnity. "No, my lad, he lived a long, long time ago, like a certain Uncle Ned. He used to follow a certain Doctor Johnson about, keeping a note-book in his hand and taking shorthand notes of what his hero happened to say."

"And he put it all in a book?"

"Nay, say not he put 'all' in a book. He put 'all people would stand for' in a book. Now this fable teaches little fellows like you to—Hello!" Walter suddenly shouted, "look at Dannie! See what he has found in his letter. Run right down to the office, Carlton, me-e che-e-i-l-d, and get the letter that is waiting there for me."

"There isn't any there for you," asserted Carlton, looking at Dan with as keen an interest as Walter had shown.

"Where did this come from?" said Dan in amazement, as he held a bank-note up to view.

"That should be stated, rather, 'To whom has it come?' Is that for you or me?"

"I don't know anything about it," said Dan. "The envelope is addressed to me and this bill was inside."

"How much?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Whe-e-ew!" whistled Walter. "Hold it up, so that I can see it plainly! It has been a long and weary time since I have seen such a sum as that. It does my old eyes good to look upon it, even if it is not for me."

"But where do you suppose it came from?" asked Dan once more.

"Carlton, did you send that to Dan?" inquired Walter, turning to the younger boy and speaking in pretended sternness.

"Did I send it? I send it?" laughed Carlton. "What do you think I am? If I found a bill like that do you think I'd send it anywhere? Not on your life! If I had anything like that I'd stand on it and hang on with both hands. Let me look at it, Dan," he added, as he extended his hand for the money.

"I don't understand," said Dan, doing as he was requested.

"I don't believe that is necessary," suggested Walter lightly. "The main thing is the money and that you have it right in your hands."

"Who sent it?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"It can't be for me."

"Let me look at the envelope," said Walter. "It's directed all right," he said; "'Dan Richards, Tait School,' and it's postmarked here too. No, you can't give it up, Dan."

"But who could have sent it?" interrupted Dan.

"Scippie might," suggested Carlton.

The reference to Mr. Blackman caused a momentary awkwardness, but Walter in a moment laughingly said: "I don't believe Scippie ever saw such a sight, much less ever had one to call his own, or to pass on to some one more deserving. No, Dan; take it and use it. There isn't any use in bothering your head too much about who had it before it was sent you."

"I don't believe it can be meant for me," said Dan once more.

"It was sent to you, wasn't it? Isn't that your name on the envelope?" demanded Walter, pointing to the address.

"Yes."

"Well, what more do you want?"

"He wants another bill," suggested Carlton.

"But what am I to do with this money?" persisted Dan. "It isn't mine."

"Give it to me if you don't want it," said Carlton, extending his hand.

"But it isn't yours, either."

"Can't you think of any one who might have sent it?" asked Walter.

"I told you—Scippie," spoke up Carlton.

"He didn't do it."

"How about Al Randall?" said Carlton quizzically.

Dan smiled and shook his head, then stopping abruptly, stared a moment at his friend, and said:

"You don't suppose any one sent me this to get me into trouble, do you?"

"What kind of trouble?" asked Walter, smiling as he spoke.

"You know that they charged me with taking money last summer for pitching one game up in the country."

CHAPTER XXVII

WATSON'S DENIAL

WALTER stared a moment in astonishment at his roommate and said, "Dan, you don't imagine such a trick would be played on you—on us, do you?"

"It doesn't seem possible, but after what I've gone through the past three months I sha'n't be surprised at anything that can happen to me."

"Is the bill marked?" asked Dan, breaking in upon Walter, who was holding the bank-note in his hand.

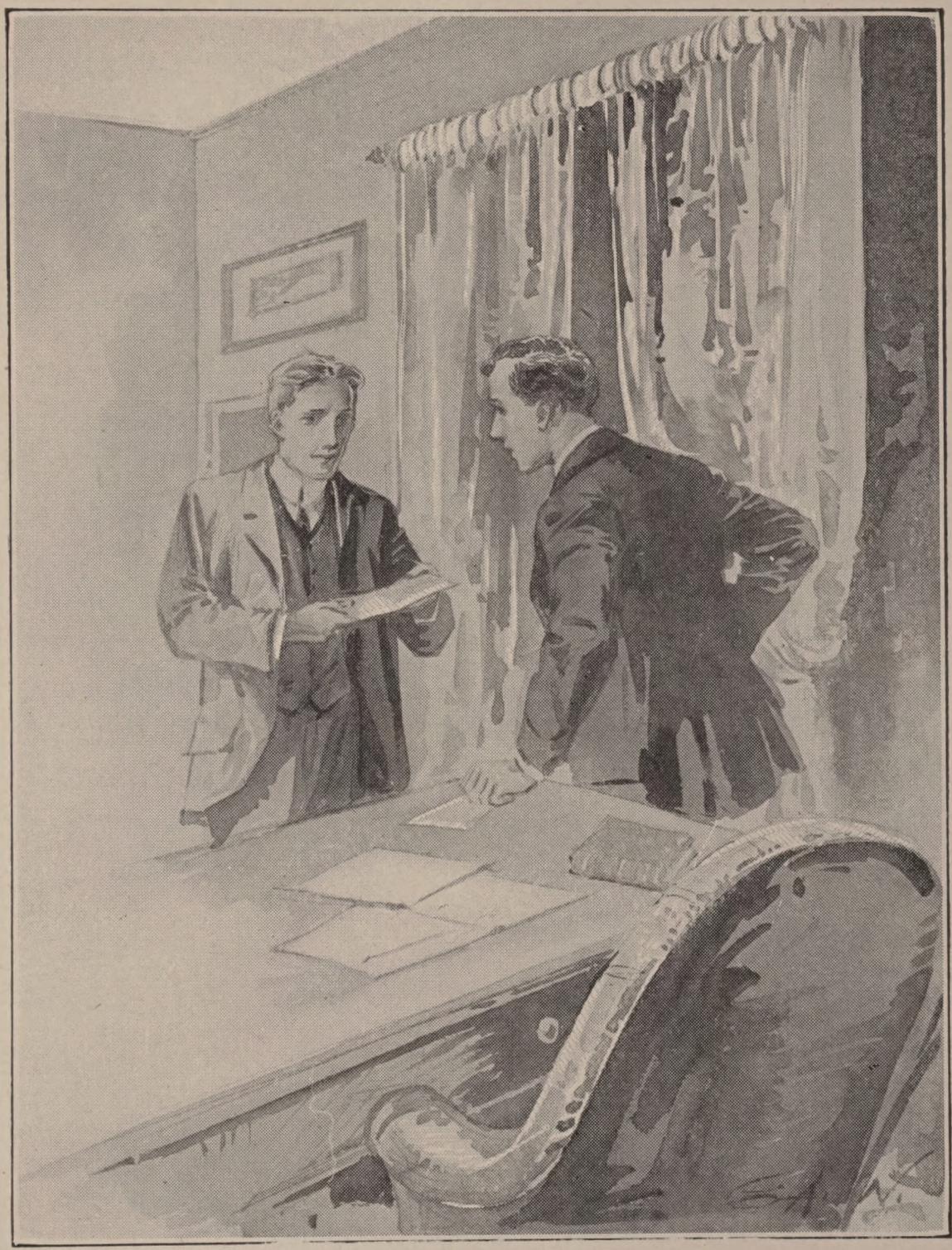
"I don't see any mark, but that isn't necessary. Anybody who wanted to might just keep track of the numbering and lettering of the bill."

"There's one thing against a trick," suggested Dan quietly. "No one would be likely to use a bill of that size. Five or ten dollars would do exactly as well."

"You come high, Dan."

"Hardly up to the mark. I'll tell you what we'll do, Walter. We'll both of us go right over to see Doctor Stevens. We'll tell him the whole story."

"That's not a bad suggestion," assented Walter. "Come along!"



" ' Is the bill marked ? ' asked Dan "

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The two boys at once left the room and fortunately found the principal at home and were taken by him to his library, where the story was soon told. The interested teacher not once interrupted while Walter, who was the spokesman, was excitedly relating the strange happening.

When he was done, Doctor Stevens said, "Have you any idea as to the one who might have sent the money?"

"No, sir, not the slightest," responded Walter promptly. "The only thing we've been able to think of was that some of the fellows in the academy might have sent it just to make trouble for our nine. Some of their fellows already have said that they were going to protest Dan."

"On what ground?"

"That he is a professional. They say he took money for pitching a game last summer."

"Did you?" inquired the principal.

"No, sir; and yet there was a little something that looked like it," replied Dan. "I had pitched before, once or twice for the same nine——"

"Where?"

"In Millport, the same place. My cousin played on the nine—he lived there, you see, and I went over mostly because he wanted me to play with their nine."

"You were not paid?"

"No, sir; but after the game a man gave me a five-dollar bill."

"Nothing had been said to you before the game about paying you for your services?"

"Not a word. I don't think it even occurred to anybody. They were just two country nines, that's all."

"Who was the man that gave you the money?"

"Mr. Staples."

"Did he live there?"

"No, sir; he lives in New York. When he was a boy he lived on a farm right near the village of Millport. He was visiting there a part of his summer vacation and he and some of his friends came over to see the game."

"And did he say why he made you the present?"

"He said he had been told that I hadn't much money and was in school and perhaps going on to college, and sir—well," added Dan in confusion, "he said I was to take the money and get something with it that I wouldn't have bought——"

"I see," broke in Doctor Stevens with a smile. "Have you his address?"

"No, sir; but I can get it."

"You would do well to secure it. Indeed, you'd better do so at once and let me have it. It may be a good thing to have an affidavit from him that he did not make any bargain with you and that he simply presented you with the bill after the game as a slight token of his interest. Of course the matter is delicate. I don't quite understand how the academy boys learned of it. Have you any idea?"

"No, sir," replied Dan.

"I fancy there will not be any serious trouble," said the principal, smiling. "And it may be too, that no protest will be made anyway."

"My cousin knows the man who gave me the money and he can find out his address for me."

"Very good. Now, why do you suspect the giver of this one-hundred-dollar bill?"

"I don't 'suspect' him," answered Dan simply. "I am just puzzled by it. I haven't anybody in my family who'd do such a thing, that's all."

"And you can't think of anybody outside of your family?"

"No, sir."

"That was why we didn't know but it might be another trick on the part of the academy fellows," spoke up Walter.

"That is your only reason for suspecting them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I don't think you need be unduly anxious. As for this money, I see no reason why Richards should not take it."

"Neither do I!" spoke up Walter so promptly that all three laughed and the boys departed.

"Dan, haven't you any idea at all where that money came from?" asked Walter once more of his companion on their way back to their room.

"Not much."

"Why don't you tell a fellow?" said Walter somewhat irritably.

"There are two reasons: one is that I may be all wrong; and the other is, that I don't know that I have any right. It's all just suspicion."

"But I'd like to know your suspicions."

"And I'd like to tell you, but I can't," laughed Dan.

"Have it your own way," retorted Walter petulantly. "It really hasn't anything to do with the nine?"

"No, sir; not a thing. It's only a suspicion anyway; I may be all wrong."

Relieved by the assurance, Walter made no further protest and in good humor the boys were soon seated in their room busily engaged upon their lessons.

Although Dan did not refer to his unexpected present, it had not by any means been forgotten by him, and on the following evening he went directly to Watson's room. As he took the chair which his classmate indicated he tried to see his face, but for some reason he was not able to obtain a direct glance from Watson. The latter was busy or pretended to be busy over some papers on his desk and did not turn to Dan.

"Well, Dan, how is everything?" Watson said at last as he swung about in his desk chair.

"Trouble, Watson, trouble," replied Dan gloomily, though he laughed as he spoke. "Look here, Watson, can you keep a secret? I've had my doubts ever since Al——"

"Now quit that, Dan Richards! I never told Al a thing."

"Good! You're quick to catch on to an idea—before I say a word."

"I knew what you meant," said Watson.

"Look here once more, Watson, I'm in a peck of trouble," said Dan abruptly.

"I'm sorry," said Watson, instantly sitting erect and with an expression of sympathy facing his classmate. "Anything I can do to help?"

"You'll keep it quiet if I tell you?"

"On your life."

"Well, you know the fellows expect me to pitch this spring——"

"They don't 'expect' you to, they're going to have you pitch."

"If the academy fellows will let me."

"What have they to do about it?"

"They may protest me. I understand that some of them say that I took money for pitching last summer."

"But you didn't, did you?" Watson arose from his chair in his excitement and peered eagerly into the face of his friend.

"I'll tell you about it if you'll sit down and don't get excited," said Dan quietly. "This was the way of it," he continued as he related the story.

"But they can't do anything about that!" declared Watson. "That was straight——"

"It was straight; I know that as well as you do,"

broke in Dan. "The only thing is that if anybody wanted to, he might give the tale a bad twist. It would be very easy to have some of the other schools get some of their friends to make presents to some fellows that might play ball——"

"But they know you're not that kind," interrupted Watson.

"Do they? Well, if the present which Mr. Staples made me was all, I guess we'd be able to fix it up. But yesterday I got another scare. Somebody sent me a hundred-dollar bill."

"I wish somebody would try to scare me that way. But I don't see how that need trouble you, Dan."

"But I don't know who sent it! Suppose it was somebody connected with the academy that sent it?"

"He'd be about as likely to send it as—as—as—Scippie."

"If he wanted to make trouble for me?"

"How would he make trouble?"

"Suppose he should claim it was money he had paid me for pitching. It would be about as fair as the other charge."

"Did they really make a charge?"

"No—not quite. There's a report that they are going to."

"That sounds better. I don't believe they are going to do any such thing."

"That's what I wanted to ask you. And the hundred-dollar bill—you don't think that will make any trouble, either?"

"Not a bit. How can it?"

"If some of the academy fellows sent it——"

"They didn't send it."

"Didn't they? What makes you think they didn't?"

"Oh, I don't know all the reasons, but I'm perfectly sure it didn't come from the academy."

"Where could it have come from?" asked Dan, looking keenly at his classmate as he spoke.

"I don't know," replied Watson; then suddenly he added, "you didn't think I was the guilty party, did you?"

"I didn't know."

"Well, you know now!" retorted Watson, throwing back his head and laughing loudly. "I am not passing hundred-dollar bills around to my friends."

"You paid me well for what I did for you."

"I didn't pay you at all. You brought the money back along with what you called your thirty pieces of silver. I couldn't make it out and I can't yet. You beat me, Dan. Now I'm perfectly willing to stand by any bargain I make, but I'm not passing the plate for anybody to help himself!"

"All right," said Dan as he departed.

It was plain that Watson had not been the sender of the strange bill. Somehow Dan had believed that he had been. He had thought over possible ones and had settled in his thoughts that Watson might have sent it anonymously in order that Dan might suspect who the donor was and be held more tightly to the

promise he had given not to disclose to any one the fact that he was the writer of the essay which his classmate had handed in as his own.

If Watson had not sent the bill, who could the sender be? Still mystified and striving to find some solution for the perplexing problem, Dan hastened back to his room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A CRITICAL TIME

THE spring days soon were at hand, and the life of the Tait School changed as promptly and almost as radically as the change in the appearance of the trees upon the campus. As soon as the ground was fairly settled the candidates for the nine began their daily practice upon the field. Before this time Dan and five other boys who were to compose the various batteries were coached in the gymnasium, but it was only when the outdoor work was taken up that anything like enthusiasm was manifested by the boys.

To Dan the contrast between the position which he now held and that which had been thrust upon him in the winter was doubly grateful. He was aware that the present feeling lacked some of the enthusiasm of the preceding year, for there were some who still eyed him askance and the prevalent belief among the boys that he had not been altogether fair with Al Randall had not entirely disappeared.

Even with Walter, Dan occasionally was aware that there still was lurking in the mind of his roommate a feeling that Dan had been on the wrong side,

in part at least; but each boy had been so eager to have their former relations resumed that both tried to ignore the debatable or troublesome questions. As a consequence, whenever Al Randall's name was mentioned Dan was silent, and as each of the two boys tried to avoid the other's presence, it was seldom that they were in the same company.

The feeling of Al Randall toward Dan apparently was unchanged. The boy was moody, and there would be several days at a time when he would have little to do with any of his schoolmates, although there would be other days when his laugh would be the loudest and his share in the noisy shouts would be manifest to all the school. Hodge, Ned Davis, and Dan's other close friends were all loyal, though even with them there was an element of reserve whenever certain details in the recent history of the Tait School were mentioned. Naturally Dan Richards felt this, though even he could not always have explained the ground of his feelings. He was doing his utmost to carry out the advice of Doctor Stevens, who remained his wise and friendly adviser, and that was to accept the natural expressions of good-will which were freely and not infrequently given, not to look for too much that was somber-hued, and not to dwell upon it even when such things could not be ignored; and above all to try to carry himself in the school life in such a manner that the boys would not suspect how deep had been the suffering their actions had caused him.

Dan had placed the one hundred dollars in the keeping of the principal. He steadily refused to use any of it until such a time as he should know that he would be justified in so doing. With the passing of the days no further light had been obtained concerning the source of the unexpected gift, and Dan himself now seldom referred to it, and apparently it had altogether passed out of the recollection of Walter and his other friends.

Mr. Blackman had found one or two boys whom he sent to Dan with a recommendation for him to tutor them, but the advice of the principal had been so strong that he had not taken up the work.

"There is a deal of nonsense talked about working one's way through school," Doctor Stevens had said to Dan. "It is all very well for certain ones to try, but you must not even think of it." The principal had then, in response to Dan's protest, explained that Dan was a boy who required time in which to accomplish his best results. He was steadily improving both in the quality and quantity of his work. If outside help was necessary the problems would be markedly different, but as his own expenses had been provided for in a way that left him free from the heavy task and strain of doing several hours of work daily in addition to his regular duties, Doctor Stevens had very decided objections. And Dan had acquiesced, though not without strong inward and unspoken protests.

It would be difficult to say that the closing days of

the year found Dan enjoying them as he had in the preceding spring, when the experience of every day was altogether new and novel to him. Now he was more accustomed to the routine of the school life. The novelty was all gone, though naturally the interest of every boy in the outcome of the contests of the nine was a never-ending topic of interest. It became manifest that the series of games between the schools that composed the league to which the Tait School belonged was to have results very much the same as in the preceding year, when Dan had been the successful pitcher of his own school nine and had been a stumbling-block in the way of the rivals.

Al Randall and the young Indian, John Littlemouse, were the brilliant players of the team, the former's position being in the left field, though often he was compelled to do duty behind the bat, and the latter taking the place of short-stop. So brilliant at times was the playing of the Indian boy that he had become the ideal of his schoolfellows, who formerly lavished all their words of praise upon Dan. Partly because the latter had now become an accepted part of the school life and partly because of the recent opposition for his supposed treachery to Al Randall, this place apparently no longer was his by right.

Indeed, Dan fully understood that his task now was not so much to win a position in the eyes of his fellows as to maintain the one into which he had

been thrust. If he should do well he would be doing merely what the school expected him to do. If he should fail, or to any marked extent fall below their expectations, then he would be lowered at once in the eyes of all. In the preceding year he had been compelled to fight hard for recognition. Now his chief struggle was to keep himself from falling—like a man who had climbed some high point where his balance must be maintained with the utmost care to prevent him from losing all that he had gained and much more.

The affection shown by the boys for John Littlemouse, however, did not arouse any feeling of jealousy in Dan, for he himself was one of the most devoted admirers of the Indian boy. John's good nature was seldom shaken. His laugh was hearty and his feet were fleet. He was not afraid of a wrestling-match, yet never sought one. On the ball-field, with perhaps the sole exception of Dan, he was the hardest-working member of the nine. His voice was never heard in dispute and his temper was always under control. In a measure it is true that John was perhaps a little more popular among the younger boys than was Dan, whose friends were somewhat limited to the older ones, who understood him better than did those who were not brought into so close contact with him in the classroom or on the athletic field.

Carlton Hall was still the faithful follower of the school pitcher, and his boyish devotion became still

more intense in the spring because Dan on several occasions had gone with his follower to the field and there had given lessons to Carlton in throwing curved balls.

The highest ambition of the younger boy was to become the pitcher of his class nine, and when Dan had assured him that he was promising and already had learned how to throw an "out" and "in," as well as how to change his speed without apparently changing his motions, Carlton's cup of happiness was filled almost to overflowing. He sang Dan's praises continuously, and his loyalty became still more intense.

The preliminary games in the league had been held, but, as had been commonly expected, none of them had given either the Tait School nine or that of the Military Academy anything more than a try-out. Both their teams had won easily, and when the scores made by each against the same nine were compared, little satisfaction was obtained from the result because no one knew just how much exertion had been required to win.

The Tait School was to have two games with the Military Academy—one on the grounds of each school. If the standing of the two teams still remained relatively unchanged after these two contests, then a third game was to be played on some neutral grounds.

There was a time, after the first game with their rivals had been won by the Tait School by the score

of six to five, when the confidence of all in the school was strong that the pennant again would be won. These hopes were somewhat dashed, however, when the return game, played on the academy grounds, was won by the academy nine. It was not that Dan had not pitched so successfully in the second game as in the first. The loss was due to the failure of the Tait boys to bat the opposing pitcher. When hits were required it almost seemed that the skill of the academy pitcher became uncanny. He persistently gave Dan low balls, which were his special "black beasts." When Al Randall came to bat, a sharp in-curve with a decided drop provided the means of his downfall, while even John Littlemouse, who was seldom without a hit of some kind, struck out three times in succession.

"That fellow has the measure of every one of us," exclaimed Walter, as in the last inning of the second game, after striking out, he threw down his bat in disgust, and returned to the players' bench. "I don't see where he got it."

"Where did Dan get the measure of the academy fellows?" asked Hodge with a laugh. "He's had every one of us working on the thing all spring."

"That's different," said Walter, making a wry face as he spoke. "I wonder where this new pitcher came from—this Anthony man. He's better than the fellow they had last year. I didn't know this chap was to pitch till our game last week. I thought he was their third-baseman."

"That's where you got fooled," said Ned dryly.

"He did play third base in all the games with the other school," asserted Walter. "I never had an idea he could pitch."

"Well, you know he can now, don't you?" laughed Ned.

"I ought to know it. I've struck out twice. How does his strike-out compare with yours, Dan?" Walter added as he turned to his roommate.

"He's ahead, I guess," answered Dan simply.

"How much?"

"Two or three."

"Dan hasn't been trying for a record," spoke up Carlton, who, clad in the school uniform, was seated among the players, though he was only a substitute "lowered to zero power," to use his own expression. "He's just tried to keep the ball in the air. If you fellows can't take care of it then, it isn't his fault."

"More! Bravo! Great applause! Wild enthusiasm!" laughed Ned. "One more county heard from and the returns not all in yet!"

"You know it is just as I tell you," declared Carlton, unshaken by the good-natured laugh that followed.

"I know the batter is out," said Walter. "When John Littlemouse throws his club on the ground that way you may know that he'll let out a war-whoop or two before long and quite suddenly."

"Only one more chance, fellows," murmured Ned as he watched Hodge, who was whirling a bat in

each hand as he moved toward the plate. "Two out, none on bases, and the score eight to five. I fear me the Tait School is in for it."

"If it is, that will only make the standing the same for both schools. We can lose this game and still win the championship. The academy has got to win this game to have any chance at the—Hi, Yi, Yi!" Carlton, who was talking, suddenly sprang to his feet and emitted a wild and prolonged yell as Hodge sent a swift hit just inside the line which the third-baseman failed to get. "This is where St. Anthony goes up in the air!" roared Carlton in his glee. "We've got his measure now! We're started and nobody can hold us back! We——"

"Keep still, you midget," ordered Walter a trifle impatiently.

"I can't keep still," retorted Carlton. "Hear the fellows."

"You're supposed to be one of the nine," said Ned; "you act as if you belonged in the lowest form——"

"I belong right here," broke in Carlton. "Now, Al Randall," he added as the latter came to the bat, "you've just got to bring Hodge in. Never mind any fancy play. Just hit that ball on——"

"Keep quiet or we'll order you sent off the grounds," said Walter quite savagely this time. "Haven't you one little piece of a grain of sense in your topknot?"

"I have; that's why I'm interested."

"Be interested, but don't be a cheap sport. Half the lesson is in learning not to squeal when——"

"Hi! Yi! Yi! Yi!" broke in Carlton, dancing about on the grass almost as if he was bereft of his senses when Randall sent the ball between the second-baseman and center-fielder. "Run!" yelled the boy to Hodge, who had not paused at second base, but now was headed for third. "Run! Run! You are just crawling," the lad called, as, unaware of what he was doing, he began to slap his sides with his arms and leaped up and down on the grass. Walter's rebukes and warnings were alike unheeded when it was seen that Hodge was safe on third base and that Al Randall had gained second.

"The pitcher's rattled! He has gone up in an aeroplane! His feet are fifty feet above the earth! O-u-u-u-c-h!" Carlton suddenly added as Dan seized him by his left ear. "Let go! I have got to hear!"

"Will you stop, or shall I stop you?"

"I'll stop," promised Carlton.

"See that you do! We have a coach on the line and plenty of good cheering on the bleachers. Leave all the yelling to them; do you hear?"

"I'll not whisper," promised Carlton as Dan released him.

"You're safe in that promise. You haven't 'whispered' to-day," said Walter, laughing.

"How can a fellow keep quiet with two out and two on bases in the ninth inning? You fellows have forgotten how it feels to be young."

"Watch Watson," suggested Dan as his classmate's turn to bat was announced.

"He's just got to bring those fellows in," murmured Carlton as he rubbed his ear and watched the batter.

The tensity of the silence that fell over the assembly was something almost to be felt. No one heeded Hodge's antics on third or gave much attention to Al Randall, who had advanced thirty feet or more from his base, and was dancing about in the line striving to watch the player near him, as well as to distract the attention of Anthony, the pitcher, by his antics. But Anthony was not to be turned aside. Coolly he stooped and rubbed the ball in the grass. Taking his place in the pitcher's box he first carefully looked at Watson, who was facing him, and then twisting and turning to secure every ounce of power which his body could give, he threw the ball.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FINAL WEEK

THE Tait School batter struck at the first ball and sent it swiftly to the short-stop. A wild shout from the supporters of the school greeted the effort, and there were hoarse calls mingled with the cries: "Throw it home!" "Second!" "Second!" "Two out, play for the batter!"

For a moment pandemonium seemed to rule. The academy short-stop quickly secured the ball, but for a moment seemed dazed by the noise and apparently did not know what to do with the ball now that he had made the stop. Meanwhile Hodge was running swiftly toward the home plate and Al Randall had gained third.

A savage cry—almost like an appeal—from the academy captain seemed to bring the halting fielder to his senses, and heeding the call to play for the batter, flung the ball to first. An instantaneous silence came over players and spectators alike as breathlessly they waited for the umpire to give his decision on the close play.

As the official stooped and threw out his hands to indicate that the runner was out, a shout of anger

came from the Tait School contingent, mingled with a cry of delight from the friends of the opposing team.

"He's a robber!" shouted Carlton, dancing about in his rage. "We can't play the academy and the umpire too! Why can't we have a square deal?"

"You stop your crying," ordered Walter, though his own face was livid. "If we are beaten we don't play any baby act. You stop your whining, I tell you, or this is positively your last appearance with the nine of the Tait School."

Walter was so manifestly in earnest that Carlton instantly ceased, though he muttered as he picked up his sweater: "It may be all right, but I can't stand it to be fed like that. It's just plain stealing, that's what it is."

"You couldn't see the play as well as the umpire could," said Dan, who too was selecting his belongings. "Besides, it's better to be a good sport than it is to win every time."

"Maybe it is; but all the same, I guess you wouldn't have wept many briny tears if the 'ump' had given us that deal."

"Probably not," assented Dan. "I'm sorry we lost it; but, after all, we'll have another chance. Come on out and join in the yell."

"I can yell all right!" answered Carlton grimly, nevertheless proceeding at once toward the group of his fellows assembling for the school cheer.

The cheer for their rivals was given noisily if not

heartily by the nine and then the boys all ran toward the dressing-rooms.

"You know, I really think that decision was rank," suggested Walter while he and his teammates were dressing. "It was dead against us."

"Ask Watson, he ought to know," suggested Dan.

"How was it, Watson?" asked Walter of the boy who had been the victim of the decision.

"I'm sorry to have to say it, but I was out," replied Watson.

"How was that?"

"I didn't have my foot on the bag. It was right against Daly's foot, which he had put in the way."

"Then, of course, you were out," said Ned.

"If the academy first-baseman blocked him? Not by your total vital force!" spoke up Carlton promptly.

"Well, my foot wasn't on the base," said Watson. "I lost my chance to cover myself with glory. If I had made a home run I'd have tied the game——"

"A base-hit might have done the trick," interrupted Al Randall.

"All I can say is that I done my best," said Watson meekly.

"You what?" demanded Carlton pausing in his task. "What did you say?"

"I said I done my best. Angels can't do no more."

"They wouldn't do—or at least they wouldn't say —what you did."

"Why not?"

"Most of the angels I've met use the English language."

"So do I."

"You call that English? 'I done my best.' What will become of you if you don't show a greater love for your mother tongue?" As apparently there was no malice in the words or manner of Carlton, even Watson joined in the laugh.

"I don't know why I do it, but I'm all the time saying that."

"Don't do it again. Perhaps some day if you're careful you'll be writing essays for the prize."

Watson quickly looked at Dan and then searchingly glanced at Carlton. There was a faint trace of a smile on the face of the former, but that of the younger boy was demure, and apparently Watson's first feeling of alarm was quieted.

"Where did this new pitcher, Anthony, come from?" inquired Hodge.

"That's what all of us would like to know," responded Walter.

"He's a beauty, anyway," said Hodge.

"I wonder why we never heard of him as a pitcher," said Al Randall, who up to this time had been silent.

"Chiefly because he didn't pitch, I guess," explained Walter. "He's been playing third base."

"Oh, they've been holding him back for a surprise party for us," laughed Hodge.

"Well, they—and that umpire—surprised us to-day, all right," said Ned grimly.

"We may have a surprise for them," spoke up the young Indian, John Littlemouse.

"What? How is that?" asked Walter, as the boys all stopped and looked at their companion.

"I know him."

"Who is he? Isn't he all right?"

"I know he pitched against the nine I played on last summer."

"Where was that?"

"Up in the northern part of the State."

"He had a right to pitch if he wanted to, hadn't he?"

"It was said he was paid for his work that day."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know except what I heard."

"We'll have to look into that," said Carlton. "You know these academy fellows were going to protest Dan and now they've gone and did the same thing they accused us of."

"Look out for that 'did,'" said Ned with a laugh. "'Have did.' That's almost as good as your pulling up Watson for his slip."

"Never mind a little thing like English if the academy fellows are playing a professional pitcher against us."

"I knew he was a pitcher," said Al Randall. "They were afraid they weren't going to be able to use him."

"Why not?" asked Walter.

"Because what John Littlemouse says is true."

"He did get money for that game?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll protest him," declared Walter emphatically.

"No, you won't," said Al quietly.

"Why won't we?"

"Because his money was a 'present'—that's all it was, because Daly, the captain of the academy nine, told me so himself."

"That won't work. We're ready to play the academy any day in the week, outside of Sunday, but we won't stand for any ringers or professional pitchers."

"He isn't a pro. Daly said he wasn't and proved it too."

"How?"

"He said a man came up to Anthony when the game was over and made him a present of a banknote. He'd been so pleased with the work Anthony had done in the box that he wanted to show his appreciation of it. That's all there was to it too. Daly told me so himself almost in those very words too."

All the boys in the dressing-room became silent and looked at Dan, who was doing his utmost to keep his cheeks from flushing.

"If there is any question, it might be a good thing to have Anthony and me both put off the teams,"

said Dan quietly, at last breaking in upon the awkward silence.

"No, leave both on," said Walter hastily. "I guess if what Al Randall says is the truth we won't have to make any very violent protest."

"I guess it's about as broad as it is long," said Ned dryly.

"That isn't the point," declared Dan warmly. "I took money last summer—I don't make any bones of saying so."

"That's all right," spoke up Walter. "We know you did and it's all right. If it wasn't you'd hear from the academy fellows, and before this too."

"Of course it's all right," said Al Randall without glancing at Dan as he spoke. "It is just as fair to take five dollars as a present from a spectator after a game has been won as it is for—for—a writer to get pay for the way he has put pen and paper together. It's every bit as fair."

Despite his efforts to be calm Dan glanced at Watson, who was staring at Al Randall. What did Al mean? Were his words merely a coincidence?

"Speaking of a fellow putting pen and paper together," continued Al Randall, "I wonder who is to get the prize for the essay this year."

"I give it up," said Carlton promptly as his companions laughed.

"I handed in one. I don't mind saying that I did, either," said Al.

"So did I," added Dan quietly.

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Well, what will be the use of any of the rest of us expecting anything then? Did you write for that prize, Watson?" added Al in apparent indifference.

"Yes."

All the boys looked up in surprise at the acknowledgment, and even Watson showed some confusion.

"I'm glad you done it," said Carlton, though there was no malice in his tone.

"I wish I had did it too," said Walter in mock seriousness. "If I had known that Watson was going in for it I believe I'd have tried too. What subject did you write on?" he added, turning to his classmate.

"Don't bother him," said Al maliciously. "It isn't fair to quiz him too much. Besides, the prize hasn't been awarded yet. I'm glad Watson wrote for the prize, and I hope he'll be more lucky with his pen than he was with his bat to-day. Two on bases and two out! What a chance!"

"Quit that, Al," said Walter angrily. "Wat got his base. He was blocked by the first-baseman and robbed by the umpire. That fellow we had on third might have got in his run if he hadn't been made of wood and his feet hadn't been covered with glue."

"That's me," remarked Al, solemnly rolling his eyes in a manner that caused his companions to laugh and so break over the threatening danger, for the boys now departed from the room and entered

the bus which was waiting to carry them to the station.

The following day it was announced that the final and decisive game would be played Tuesday afternoon of the approaching week. This date was in the commencement week of each school, and as the game was to be held at Fordtown, a little city about equally distant from each school, the grounds certainly would be neutral. A great crowd, however, was expected, for many of the "old grads" and friends of each school were to be on hand for the closing week.

Even the events of the closing week would not detract from the supreme interest of each school in the final game of baseball. It was more than a repetition of what had occurred the preceding year—it was that with the increased interest of the additional year.

Monday morning the award of the prizes was to be made in the chapel by Doctor Stevens. In almost every department of school work prizes were to be announced, and many of those who had made an effort to secure the award were in a state of only partly suppressed excitement. Fathers and mothers, sisters and younger brothers, friends and relatives were present in large numbers to share in the interest of the time, which meant much to many of the boys of the Tait School.

When the announcement was made that Dan Richards had won the prize for the greatest im-

provement in the work of two years, the response was generous and general, though even Dan could not fail to notice the fact that a certain enthusiasm was lacking which in the preceding year had been in evidence whenever Dan's name was announced publicly.

An " honorable mention " in Latin, won by Walter Borden, received its warm response from the assembly, and Dan was apparently as delighted over his roommate's success as he had been over his own.

The name of each successful contestant was generously applauded when Doctor Stevens announced the winners in the various departments, but Dan's greatest personal interest was in the awarding of the prize for the essays. Both he and Watson sat in the rear of the chapel, as the seating was arranged alphabetically. Dan occasionally glanced shyly at his classmate, whose eyes were turned toward a man seated in the gallery. The striking resemblance between Watson and this stranger at once convinced Dan that they were father and son. As he looked he recalled the cordial relation that always had been part of the lives of Walter and his father and that which he frequently, indeed usually, found was a possession of most of the boys in the Tait School.

The unreasonableness of Mr. Watson in expecting from his boy what it was not in him to give, aroused Dan's anger afresh. It was so manifestly unfair. He could understand how his classmate, almost in desperation, had been driven to hire some one to do

for him what he had not been able to do for himself.

The expression on Watson's face—its mingled fear, eagerness, and hope—was almost pathetic.

Dan was roused from his momentary reverie by the words of Doctor Stevens: "I now have the pleasure of announcing the winner of the prize for the best essay. I may state in passing that the essays submitted this year not only have greatly outnumbered those in any preceding contest, but also have been of an unusually high grade. In all, fifteen essays were submitted to the committee, and it is my privilege now to give you the name of the winner."

CHAPTER XXX

CONCLUSION

THE prize is awarded the writer of the essay which had for its subject 'Was Aaron Burr a Traitor?'" announced Doctor Stevens. The statement, however, was meaningless to all in the audience, with the possible exception of two boys who looked quickly at each other when the announcement was made.

In the tense silence that spread over the audience the principal took from the desk in front of him the envelope which had written upon it the fictitious name of the writer which had been signed to the essay. Tearing open the envelope Doctor Stevens then drew forth the slip which contained the true name of the winner, and the expression of surprise that appeared on his face was not altogether lost upon the assembly that was intently watching.

"The name of the winner is Francis Josephus Watson," said the principal in his quiet manner. "This concludes the list of those who have won prizes."

A ripple of applause followed the award, but among all the boys of the Tait School, the prevailing response was one of incredulity, if not of

surprise. Watson, winner of the prize for the best essay? There must be some mistake! The thing was not to be believed. "Wat" was neither a student nor a writer. Indeed, in his surprise Ned leaned toward his seatmate and whispered, "Who'd have believed that Wat 'has did' it?"

To Dan the award brought mingled feelings. The essay which he had written and submitted under his own name had failed even of mention, while that which he had written and sold Watson had won the prize. It was almost funny, Dan assured himself, and smiled as he again looked behind him at his successful classmate.

To Dan's surprise he saw that instead of being elated by his "success" Watson's face was drawn as if by pain. But when Dan looked at his classmate's father, and saw that his face was beaming with pride, his momentary feeling of anger at the younger Watson instantly changed. The boy was to be pitied more than blamed. He was in a false position and Dan even felt like congratulating himself, for his own place was much to be preferred to Watson's. Dan at least had shown that he had been able to win, while Watson was neither a true winner, nor could he repeat the work which had secured for him his prize.

As the audience filed slowly out of the chapel the successful boys were the recipients of many expressions of interest and congratulation from their schoolmates and friends.

"I say, Watson, old man," exclaimed Walter, slapping his classmate on his back, "that was great! You fooled us all! I didn't know you were a literary light."

"I'm not," said Watson miserably.

"Oh, yes you are. If we had it to do over again, we'd make you the editor of the Tait School 'Reporter.' Why haven't you told us of your genius before? You didn't have any right to hide your candle under a broomstick."

"I'm no literary genius," repeated Watson, manifestly so utterly wretched that Dan's heart ached in sympathy with him.

At this moment Watson's father, a large man with a loud voice and a pompous manner ("even louder than his voice," Walter declared), approached and said: "My son, I am proud of you! You see, boys," he added, turning to the group standing about his son, "there's a chance for every one of you. This talk about one boy having a better chance than another is all bosh. It is the veriest gibberish. My son needed to try, that was all, and when I insisted upon his entering the contest for the prize for the best essay, he was somewhat reluctant. I insisted, however, and to-day you see the result. I most sincerely hope you will all take the lesson to heart. My boy has made me feel very pleased and proud. You should all always be ready to try."

"But, Mr. Watson," spoke up Al Randall, "suppose we had all tried for the prize? There's only

one prize given. The most of us would have had to lose."

"Quite true," replied Mr. Watson pompously. "Quite true. Not every one has the ability, I grant you. But my chief contention is that I recognized my son's power before he himself was aware of possessing it. I suggested, he resented; I insisted, he tried. Behold the result. That is the supreme test."

"Dan, why didn't you try for the prize?" asked Al viciously as he turned to his classmate, though this was almost the first time in months since he had spoken directly to him.

"I did try," replied Dan quietly.

"You did?"

"Yes, I handed in one."

"Under your own name?" asked Al with a sneer.

"Certainly. You don't suppose I'd hand one in without my name, do you?"

"You didn't win."

"That is ancient history," retorted Dan quietly.

"Did only one of your essays go in?" asked Al Randall.

"What do you mean?" demanded Dan, looking directly into the face of his classmate.

"Nothing. I was just wondering which one won?"

"That one won that won the one prize," laughed Walter; "and the one that won was Watson."

The boys laughed and Dan hastily turned away, glad for Watson's sake that the ordeal was over.

On his way to the dining-hall Dan was overtaken by Watson, and his troubled expression at once assured him that all was not well with his classmate.

"Well, Watson," he said cordially, "your father seems to be satisfied."

"He may be, but I'm not," replied Watson gloomily.

"What's the trouble?"

"I feel like a sneak-thief! You know I never thought of it before—but that prize really is yours and I'm sneaking off with it. I don't believe a tramp that steals candy from a baby feels smaller than I do to-day."

"You bought the essay and paid for it, didn't you?" asked Dan not unkindly, recalling the words which Watson had used when the bargain was first made.

"I'd rather be in your shoes than mine," said Watson miserably.

"So had I," laughed Dan.

"What can I do?"

"About what?"

"You know what I mean."

"Yes, I guess I do," said Dan. "I've been through a part of it myself."

"You have? I don't understand——"

"Never mind that," broke in Dan; "what do you want to do?"

"I ought to tell my father just exactly how it is.

But I'd rather be horsewhipped," added Watson gloomily.

"That's so."

"If he didn't expect so much that I can't give!" groaned Watson. "I'm willing to try. I'll do my best; but if I haven't any brains, I'm not to blame, am I?"

"You have brains."

"Brains? I couldn't write an essay like that if my life depended upon it."

"And I couldn't tell as much about the best way to run a farm as you can, if my life depended upon it," laughed Dan, "and I've lived all my life on a farm."

"But that doesn't take any brains," protested Watson.

"It doesn't? You never made a greater mistake in your life. That's the trouble with people. They speak of farming as if it was on a dead level. You might as well speak of preaching or teaching or law or any other trade being on a dead level. I've seen a farmer fail to raise any crop but weeds and mortgages, and then the farmer right next to him get rich. They were both farmers; but one had, or used, his brains and the other didn't. It takes a lot of brains to be a good farmer or a good anything."

"I wish you'd talk to my father," said Watson earnestly.

"I can't do that."

"You can talk to me and I guess you can talk to him too," pleaded Watson. "He seems to think a fellow can't be a gentleman if he does anything that makes his hands dirty."

"I know," laughed Dan.

"Why didn't you stay on the farm yourself?" demanded Watson abruptly.

"You think you've got me now, don't you? Let me tell you, Watson, that's just what I'm going to do, not 'stay,' but go to farming. My brother Tom is older than I am and he's the best brother that ever wore shoes. But our farm is a dinky little affair and isn't big enough for two. Besides, I believe if a farmer trains his brains he gets as good returns as any other man does who trains his brains for the work he wants to do."

"And you're going to be a farmer?" asked Watson again eagerly, though almost incredulously.

"That's what I want to be," said Dan. "I've been home with Walter and some of the other fellows in vacation, and of course I've always had a good time. But no big city for me! I like to see things around me that can grow and aren't all made like those sky-scrapers in New York. I love animals. Why, it made my heart ache just to see the pet dogs in the city. That's no place for dogs. A dog doesn't get half a chance there. I'm going to have some dogs worth while when I start in. And horses, and steam-plows. You'll have to come and see my barns and the great fields of grain and

my cattle. Why, man, that is the only life worth living! You get room to breathe! Your neighbors' sharp elbows aren't jabbing in your ribs. You have air fit to take into your lungs. You don't start in as somebody's office boy."

"Dan, will you talk to my father?"

"I can't. He'd laugh at me. I guess you'll have to do your own job, Watson."

"Will you go with me to Doctor Stevens while I tell him?"

Dan stopped and looked at his classmate a moment in surprise and then said: "Yes, Wat, I'll go with you. I think I know just how you feel. We'll go right after supper; and Doctor Stevens will help us out; I'm sure he will."

It was a long interview which the two boys had that evening with the principal of the Tait School. Just what was said neither ever told, but that Dan resolutely refused to have Watson's statement made public was one of the things which not even the worthy principal was able to change.

The following morning Mr. Watson appeared alone at Dan's room and, after convincing himself that no one else was present, he said: "I have come to see you about this unfortunate misunderstanding concerning the prize which my son Francis is said to have won."

"Yes, sir," said Dan quietly.

"It seems that you claim to have been the writer of the essay instead of my son."

"I haven't made any 'claims,'" retorted Dan indignantly.

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Mr. Watson hastily. "My son has explained that you were—you were of great assistance to him in the preparation of the essay."

Dan smiled, but did not reply.

"Now I am willing to recompense you in any way you suggest. Of course it would be extremely unfortunate, if—if—any rumors should be scattered concerning this unfortunate matter. If I could be assured that you would not make any reference, any reference whatever to it—I should be quite willing to pay you an amount equal to the value of the prize my son won."

"Mr. Watson," said Dan indignantly, "you need never have any fear that I shall ever tell anybody about it, if that's what you mean."

"That is my meaning exactly. Now, in view of your promise," he added as he drew his purse from his pocket, "I shall be pleased to——"

"Look here, Mr. Watson," said Dan, quietly interrupting the man and rising as he spoke, "I didn't give any promise, and I sha'n't give any."

"But you have said you would never refer to it."

"And I meant every word."

"That is the equivalent of a promise, and I am satisfied to pay you——"

"You'll not pay me even one cent."

"But my son says you helped him and——"

"That's all right, but you can't pay me. I'm sorry for Francis."

"He is quite able to get along without your sympathy. He is at an age when sentiment is very strong, and I have no doubt that he was stirred by your claim."

"I tell you I didn't make any claim."

"Doubtless he was stirred by your claim," repeated Mr. Watson, "and like an honorable gentleman he wished to make amends and avoid false reports that——"

"There will not be any report of any kind."

"Very well. I shall take measures to set matters aright if rumors reach me of any such claims."

"Poor Watson!" thought Dan after his visitor had departed. "I don't wonder he was desperate and hired me to write an essay for him. I'd rather be in my shoes than in his. My father is dead, but at least he was a man whom I can respect. I'm sorry for Wat, and he'll never get a word out of me about this matter again."

The exciting event of the week naturally was the concluding game with the Military Academy. What a crowd there was! What noisy cheers for players and nines! And what a game each pitcher played! With excitement intense and every member of the teams keyed up to the highest tension, every play was the recipient of cheers. Once when Walter leaped high into the air and with his gloved hand caught a liner that looked good for two bases, the

cheering was renewed again and again. Once Al Randall ran into the border of the crowd that surrounded and pressed into the field and caught a long fly that looked like a hit safe for three bases. There was again the noisy shouts of approval that were prolonged and enthusiastic.

But it was with the two pitchers that the highest interest was centered. Steadily for five innings neither side was able to score, Dan having struck out nine and Anthony eight. In the sixth, however, the Tait School boys won the game. Walter reached first by being hit in the shoulder. Ned Davis followed, securing his base on balls. Al Randall made a hit and the bases were filled. And now came Dan's turn to bat. He was only partly aware of the incessant cheering from the spectators. His own nerves were tingling, and he grasped his bat as a drowning man is said to lay hold on any object within the reach of his hands.

The first ball pitched was the one for which he had been waiting. Almost like the crack of a pistol the ball started toward left field. On and still on it flew, while Walter ran home and Ned Davis followed him. Dan, who was running as if his life depended upon his fleetness, did not stop when a wild shout arose from the friends of the Tait School. Dan's hit had cleared the fence behind left field—the longest hit ever seen on the grounds.

Four runs to none!

So the score stood and so it remained when the

game was ended. Again the pennant had been won, and Dan had won his own game.

The first to grasp his hand and congratulate him was Anthony, the opposing pitcher. The words of praise were pleasing to Dan, but not so pleasing as the wild plaudits of his fellows, who in triumph carried him on their shoulders to the dressing-rooms. All the troubles of the year seemed small now in the hour of triumph.

At last the year was ended. Again Dan went to see Doctor Stevens—this time to bid farewell and to speak once more about the mysterious bank-note.

"I am not at liberty to tell you who paid your second-term bill," said the principal. "You are not sorry you took my advice?"

"No, sir; though I'd like to know who was so generous to me."

"They made me promise to keep their secret."

"They!" There were more than one. Was it a combination of his friends? Had some of the boys induced their fathers to aid? Dan never knew, for not even Walter could be induced to explain.

"I may say that the investors think well of their investment," added Doctor Stevens.

"But you told me you would let me know who sent that hundred-dollar bill."

"So I did. I am free now to tell you that. It was Al Randall."

"What!" exclaimed Dan. "That can't be! He is my worst enemy."

"Apparently, yes. But he is the strangest boy I have ever had in school. He has spent so much time in thinking of what he has lost that he sometimes forgets what he has. And yet he has many good qualities. His adopted parents are wealthy and generous. They probably let him have his own way, and I have little doubt that he took the money out of his allowance, which has always been much too large for his own good, I'm sure."

"But I can't take that money."

"You don't have to. Leave it here with me until you hear from Randall. He has already gone home."

Again, as at the beginning of this story, there was a group of Tait School boys on the train—this time returning to their homes as on the former occasion they had been returning to school.

"I don't like to leave the old school," said Walter thoughtfully.

"You don't hate to leave as much as I hate to have you," spoke up Carlton. "I've got to be one of the big fellows next year."

"Poor chap!" laughed Walter. "Be good and you'll be all right."

"But think of it," protested Carlton. "Only a little while ago I was put upon and tormented, thrown up-stairs and then thrown down, and I don't know what all. If it hadn't been for Dan I'd have given up and quit."

"And I guess if it hadn't been for you and the

way you looked up to me, I'd have quit too," said Dan.

"You? I never thought you knew how to give up," said Carlton in surprise.

"A fellow doesn't learn to give up. He has to learn how not to give up."

"I guess we all have our troubles, and about all the difference there is, is that some don't try. I knew that after I told you to stay and fight it out I myself couldn't run."

"I'm glad you didn't."

"Come up and see us next year, Carlton," said Walter.

"You and Dan going to room together in college?"

"We are. We have just found out how much I need good old Dan to keep me straight," laughed Walter, though his expression was tender as he looked at his roommate.

"You don't know as much as you might," replied Dan.

"That's just the reason why I want to go on with you," said Walter.

THE END

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